

# JOLIATH

## THE MARCH OF FASCISM

Italian culture and politics  
from Dante to Mussolini—the  
vibrant interpretation of a  
people's tragedy that threat-  
ens to engulf the world.

R. A. ROBBESE

**\$3.00**

**G. A. BORGESE** is one of the masters of modern European literature, in which he has attained the highest eminence both as a scholar and as a creative writer. Recognized as the most authoritative literary critic in Italy next to Croce, he is at the same time the author of *Rubè*, a novel of post-war disintegration which has been translated into many languages and hailed by leading European writers as one of the most significant works of creative imagination of this generation. Others of his works, such as *The Tragedy of Mayerling*, gave him a wide popular audience. Borgeese was Professor of Æsthetics at the University of Milan and literary editor of Italy's most influential paper, of which he had also been foreign editor at the close of the war; but his steadfast political faith in a liberal and reconciled Europe earned him the hostility of the Fascist regime, and when he received an invitation in 1931 to come to the University of California as a visiting professor, he seized the opportunity to leave the country for a time. The Fascist oath imposed on all Italian university professors, which he refused to take, made of this temporary visit a permanent attachment to America. Borgeese has since taught Italian and Comparative Literature at Smith College and is now a professor at the University of Chicago.

**THE VIKING PRESS**

**18 East 48th Street**

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# GOLIATH

*The March of Fascism*



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The March of Fascism

BY

G. A. BORGESE

New York

THE VIKING PRESS

1937

*First Published in September 1937*

*Printed in U. S. A. by Vail-Ballou Press*

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# GOLIATH

*The March of Fascism*







**T**HIS book is not based on the conviction that we already know everything, and that any human event, past and future, can and must be explained as the predestined result of economic determinism. It does not agree with the assumption that human nature is stabilized and that human beings behave like robots whose reactions can be traced to laws as infallible as mechanical laws are supposed to be. The opinion underlying this book was expressed long ago by Leibniz when he said that men are ruled by passions more than by interests. Its purpose is to outline the characters of some of the personalities and the course of some of the passions which have carried us where we are.



There was the Great Revolution, the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. There has been, and still is, the Great Involution: Fascism, with its totalitarian states and its tribal mysticism.

The Great Involution started in Italy, between 1922 and 1925. The attempt to interpret it merely as an episode of Italian history proved futile. Its effects became as world-wide, at least for the time being, as those of the French Revolution. In 1933 Fascism conquered a greater nation, Germany; two and three years later, with the Ethiopian war, the fight against the League of Nations, and the invasion of Spain, it challenged the world. Meanwhile,

it threatened all the European West; the wave of its influence easily reached Japan; its breakers went as far as Louisiana, in these United States.

An American author wrote *If Can't Happen Here*. Why and how did it happen there, in Italy? It is impossible to acquire an understanding of the contemporary world and a clear consciousness of what should be our political and social purposes for the near future without a knowledge of the essence and origin of Fascism in its homeland, Italy.

There is no comparison between the significance of Fascism and that of Communism. Communism, whether one likes or abhors it, moves along the direction that was impressed on the human mind by ideas of the nineteenth and former centuries; it is a development of the English, American, and French revolutions. Fascism is a novelty. It is only fair to agree with Mussolini when he boasts that Fascism is—so far—the distinctive mark of the twentieth century, or, as he puts it, a new civilization.

But it is futile, again, to explain Fascism as if it were the creation of a single man, Mussolini, and a group of his followers. No man is strong enough to shake the earth. Mussolini acted upon the Italian mind, and conquered it; then, made strong by this conquest, he tried to win the world. An outline of the development of the Italian mind before Fascism is necessary to the understanding of the birth and growth of Fascism.

# I

## Italian Background



## Dante

**T**HERE is no Italian race. Many bloods are intermingled in the population crowded between the ridge of the Alps and the shore of the African sea. Even the geographical concept of Italy is comparatively recent. There is an Italian nation; that is, a community with a common literary language and a common system of psychological attitudes and spiritual beliefs. For the rest, this is the only valid definition of a nation: a human group kept together by the ties of a common education, and large enough to develop a common will.

The Italian nation rose, as did all the others in Europe, about the close of the Middle Ages; but its birth was different. Italy was not the creation of kings and warriors; she was the creature of a poet, Dante.

The foreigners who identify Italy with Dante are essentially right. His character and work had a decisive influence which grew in the centuries, until they became paramount to the leading class of the Italian people. It is hardly an exaggeration to hold that he was to Italy what Moses may have been to Israel.

His biography, as has often happened to founders of religions and nations, is sharply divided into two sections by the collapse of his natural career and the beginning of his peregrinations. He was driven into exile in 1302, when thirty-seven years old. That was his Hegira.

His early youth had been, on the whole, mediocre. He was a poor nobleman, with little nobility of blood and practically no estate at all. His parents had died, leaving him a sickly twig in the

violent clime of medieval Florence. Even his health was poor, and his appearance not comely. Slanderous rumours had also grown around his moral reputation; he was accused, at least by witty "friends," of improper conduct in financial affairs and of lack of personal courage against insulters of his and his family's honour.

Supernormally or perhaps pathologically, he had fallen in love, when a boy of nine years, with a little girl of about the same age, whose name was Bice or Beatrice. But it is reasonable to doubt whether the girl ever became aware of the flame she had kindled in the boy's soul. Later she married a Florentine banker and, although she died very young, she seems to have been a quite normal person, with a sense of humour and not without a touch of coquetry and feminine cruelty.

When Beatrice died, Dante composed the little memorial book entitled *The New Life*, in which he raised the lady of his imagination, whose fingers he had never touched, to a place in Paradise second to none except the Blessed Virgin's, and which he closed with the promise of celebrating the same lady in a major work to come, nay, of living and dying only in the light of her glory. It was, however, after this mystical escape from the frustrations of his youth that he met the only experiences of real life in all his career. In the years from 1295 to 1301 he entered into the political life of his city; he was called several times to occupy public offices and to take part in embassies; he even had a home, with a wife and children.

Then suddenly all this, a small oasis in the desert of his life, vanished. He had thrust himself into a political career, which should have seemed more unfitted than any other to the author of *The New Life*, with the same vehemence of imagination and lack of realism with which he had plunged into the emptiness of his love adventure. He misunderstood his times, missed his opportunities, and failed to understand the future. On his way back from an embassy in Rome, stopping somewhere in Tuscany, he found himself overnight an outcast, sentenced in his absence by the

Florentines, at first to a heavy fine and some other kind of punishment, a few weeks later to be burnt alive if he ever fell into their hands.

His wife did not share his exile.

Disaster and loss were now openly the destiny of all his life. He did not even save his honour, since the public accusation was of barratry: a charge which, even if calumnious, was made credible to many by his financial troubles and by such reputation as was recorded of him in the satires of his "friends."

His ruin was the result of a temperament in which the emotions and imagination were as high-strung as the organic resistance seemed weak. Of sighing, trembling, and actually fainting there is no end in his love novel, and also in other matters than in the passion of love he seemed liable to fall a prey to melancholy and fear. Although the story that "he became the friend of the man who thrashed him" may be the tale of a liar, it would have been impossible even to invent it had young Dante's name been surrounded by that aura of courage and disdain which later was to be called Dantean. At any rate, the apparent inclination of his mind and mood was conformist; whatever course the authority of tradition and law suggested, he endorsed it willingly; and if he forfeited his political life, this was not the penalty of a revolutionary transgression, but, far from it, the consequence of a mistaken conservatism, which made of him a zealot for Florentine sovereignty and an opponent of any change whatever in its domestic or its foreign policy.

If, on the one hand, his sensitiveness was morbid and his intelligence shrank before the temptation of a rebellious and inventive thought, on the other hand, the greatest asset of his personality lay in his feeling for the absolute proportions of intelligence and beauty, in his love for symmetry and unity; in other words, in his genius as a classic master-builder. Now that he was bereft of whatever he had possessed in his five or six years of real life, he was forced to dive into himself and to grasp the immaterial substance of his genius if he wanted to escape utter ruin.

No modern exile can measure the anguish of the medieval expatriate. The medieval city, loud and fierce as a bee-hive, had developed in the narrow interplay of its actions and passions a system of psychic self-sufficiency which approached the completeness of an animal instinct. The bee-hive, for all its cruelty, is the only possibility of life to the single bee; so was a medieval society like the Italian commune to its children. Expulsion was a curse. Exile was agony.

In the first years of Dante's exile there was still some hope of reconquering the mother-city, either by the change of fortunes or by force of arms. Later, hope also vanished, and Dante was alone with his work.

He had made up for the loss of Beatrice by building that shrine of *The New Life*, a toy cathedral, and transferring the dead girl into the effulgence of his private Paradise. Now that sentimental disaster was matched by political and social disgrace, other personages arose in another field of his imagination, a negative climax. They were the wicked Florentines and the bad popes. He remembered the promise at the close of *The New Life*, and started a larger building, the largest possible: a Paradise for his love, a Hell for his enemies, a Purgatory for himself, from which, after struggle and victory, he was finally to soar.

But the delicate materials with which he had built *The New Life* could not serve the purpose of this other enterprise. The first seven cantos of *The Inferno*, despite some preludes to a more forceful music, were still full of morbid resonances, of swoonings and tears and fears and desperate compassion. It seems safe to assume that he interrupted the work, and took it up again after a long interval. He was now a different man, complete in himself; whatever was left of the juvenile elements of morbidity and weakness was now balanced by the addition of wrath, hatred, pride, revenge: all elements whose rise no reader of *The New Life* would have expected in the same man. So completed, Dante became a hero, and could build a world.

It is a world of perfection and unity. What does not fit the plan



is forthwith discarded. This is true for *The Divine Comedy* as well as for the other works, philosophical, æsthetic, political, that support the *Comedy* like outer buttresses.

Symmetry is Dante's inspiration. In the harmony of the parts with the absoluteness and eternity of the whole he finds revenge for the misery and dispersion of his personal life.

The power that he has now acquired may be interpreted as the result of a voluntary effort against the natural inclinations of his soul. More likely, it is a return to the real, deeply hidden nature of his soul: as if he had broken the ice of his repressed childhood and youth, and seen suddenly surge up the flood of his creative force. Had he unrestrainedly followed the impulsion of this in-born or acquired violence, he would have become a heretic and a rebel, a declared foe of all established institutions, State and Church. His real vocation, had he been a real man of action, would have been to found a new sect and a free community, or to join, e.g., the Apostolic Brothers and their leader Fra Dolcino, who preached and practised in Northern Italy an integral evangelical communism, far more revolutionary than any other revolutionary sect was to be for centuries to come.

But he did not join them. Instead, he prepared for Fra Dolcino a very uncomfortable residence at the bottom of his fancied Hell, to which the soul of the magnanimous friar was to move, after the burning of his flesh at the stake in Vercelli. As for Dante himself, he was not burnt either by the Florentines or by the Pope. As he complacently states on another occasion, he safely wore all the time the body that had been given him, and he died at Ravenna in his bed, with the valediction of his hereditary religion and amidst the tears of his children and his lordly hosts.

This was not the result of hypocrisy or fear. Orthodoxy and conformism, those primary companions of his intellectual self, accompanied him in his exile, and he never dismissed them; but they now had a different and a deeper appeal. Now that he was destitute of all, he could not abandon the only hope of salvation that was left to him. This was his genius for symmetry, the com-

pactness of his inner life. Had he adopted the heresy of Fra Dolcino or of any other reformer, he would have split himself within himself. Heresy, schism, mean literally separation; he needed unity, unanimity.

Somewhere in *The Inferno* he surprisingly invented the most modern of myths: that of Ulysses the old, who out of sheer eagerness for intellectual adventure, out of hunger for knowledge, wins the consent of his handful of aged, weary companions to a desperate voyage towards the unknown. With the beat of their oars they force the Pillars of Hercules, that awful, forbidden gate of mystery; and after five months of rowing westwards on the lonely ocean they all drown under a tidal wave surging from an unexpectedly sighted new land; apparently blessed, despite the flames of Hell, in the everlasting memory of their spiritual reward.

Dante could invent this myth. He could also stage some half-dozen infernal heroes, who despise Heaven and Hell in the midst of their tortures, and raise their heads, wave their fists, against the supposed Almighty; a threat to the otherwise acknowledged lawfulness of the universe. But *he* did not yield to such temptations; *he* did not want to live and die in the likeness of his Titan Ulysses. The fury of his chained Titans remains like a low, thundering groan in the entrails of the earth, not really dangerous. Dante can eventually forget about it, and feel unshaken in the airy castle which he is building for himself between earth and heaven.

The stability of this castle is adamant. It is laid upon four pillars, more commanding than the Pillars of Hercules.

One of the pillars is Love. The second is Reason. The third is Authority. The fourth is Faith.

The summary of Dante's personality and experience is a flight, unequalled in straightness and resoluteness, from absolute frustration in actual life to absolute fulfilment in a dream.

## The Myths of Rome

A DREAMER, a poet, and a man whose real life had been a total failure was the founder of the Italian nation. The dowry which he bestowed upon the daughter of his mind was fourfold, as was the structure of his mind. He gave her a poetic monument, a religious mythology, a political prophecy, and a common language.

The monument, *The Divine Comedy*, had unsurpassable majesty and grandeur. It has stood since its first day in the middle of the horizon: a mark of reverence and awe for generations to come. It was impossible to think of surpassing or equalling the proportions and the loftiness of that monument. Its spell, like that of a solitary mountain in natural scenery, grew with distance and dominated the centuries. It was often difficult for the Italians to draw a line of demarcation between the æsthetic value of *The Divine Comedy* and its theoretical and practical authority. Because the work of Dante was beautiful, many inclined towards the belief that what he said in his work was also true and good. The force of his poetry supported his religion and his political science.

His religion was Christianity organized in a perfectly logical and mythological system. The Christian elements of humility, charity, love, and ecstatic inspiration are not the most familiar to Dante's mind; all his world, even in its moments of mystical enthusiasm, is under the command of intelligence and reason. The mythology, namely, the architectural construction of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, and the arrangement of history, legend, and prophecy are of such a compactness that they build a sphere, outside of which nothing is left. It is a religion closed and absolute, not susceptible to any change or progress.

Dante needed the same absoluteness and ultimate perfection in the political organization of the world. He had tried to be a Florentine, a member of the natural community in which he had been born. He had failed. He could not choose to become a citizen in any of the small cities or principalities in which he was a guest and a refugee. Neither could he, for personal and impersonal reasons, agree with the theocratical intentions of the Pope, whom he had known at first hand and whom he felt entitled to hate as his own enemy, after having hated him as an antagonist of his mother-city. The ruin of his natural career pushed him also in this respect towards a universal scheme in which all his crushed longings should find absolute satisfaction. Repressed sexual love and frustrated family affections had found their sublimation in the phantom of the celestial Lady Beatrice. No differently, his starved political instinct and his defeated craving for the harmony and plenitude of collective life were bound to fling him towards something as distant, as pure—and as certain—as Heaven. The Roman Empire fulfilled that requirement.

Dante, a Homeric beggar, started more thoroughly and conscientiously than the Emperor Charlemagne to rebuild the Roman Empire. It was a shadow of the past and a mirage of the North. Thirteen centuries earlier the Roman people had unified themselves in monarchism, unifying at the same time practically all of the known world under their rule. About nine centuries before Dante this organism had collapsed; then northern conquerors had come, trying to exhume and revive the dead and to restore the ancient empire in the shape of a Christian, universal, and perpetual monarchy. They had failed. At the time of Dante the medieval Roman Empire was already a lamentable ruin, upon whose rotting framework the new, spontaneous breeds of life, national states and communes, wildly grew. Dante did not mind. The mirage of the North was the most tangible of realities to him. The past was the future. He wrote a treatise, *Monarchy*.

He studied the imaginative tissues of the *Comedy* with the tenets of such political and historical sapience as was disclosed in

the treatise. True, the Roman Empire had been both the final achievement and the final catastrophe of the ancient civilization, the provisory settlement of an unavoidable bankruptcy. But this truth, obvious as it is, could never have reached Dante's mind. True it is also that outstanding Roman writers during the first century of the Empire bewailed the loss of republican liberty and portrayed the emperors as criminals and wretches. But Dante sealed his ears to whatever of such testimonies might have reached them and stood by the Virgil whom he worshipped as the only reliable source about whatever had happened in the ancient world; and Virgil had superabundantly praised Augustus as the founder of the Empire, as the announcer of a new Golden Age. As to liberty, it was quite clear to him that liberty is where peace and justice are; hence the assumption that the citizens of the Empire, having peace and justice, had liberty too. Whatever, for the rest, can be done by one is better done by that one than by many. The same craving for unity, the same horror of multiplicity, that had crystallized his life-experience in the symbol of Beatrice had carried him to this idolatry of the absolute world monarch.

The Roman Empire was a pagan institution, but later on it merged with Christianity, thereby becoming spiritually perfect. To be sure, the Roman people had conquered the world by war and violence, but in that particular case and after the test of such an overwhelming and stupendous success, Dante found no difficulty in maintaining that the triumphs on the battlefields were equivalent to judgments of God and that Rome, having conquered the world through ordeal by battle, conquered it also by right. She would not have vanquished so many enemies and competitors had she not been "the noblest nation on earth," therein supported by the direct will of God. Of this His will God gave better than mere circumstantial evidence. He caused His divine Son, Jesus Christ, to be born soon after the foundation of the Roman Empire, within the boundaries of that Empire, and to die at the hands of its officials. Since Christ came to the world in order that he might offer to all mankind, by means of his blood sacri-

fice, a redemption from all its sins, it is plain that guarantees of universal validity had to surround the sacrifice. Such guarantees could be offered only by a social power endowed with universal and God-given legitimacy. God Himself, choosing the Roman Empire as the executioner of His Son, acknowledged the divine right of the Roman world Empire as the only legal authority on earth. Rome, in her turn, certified with her seal the validity of the divine sacrifice.

Dante, in his turn, was convinced of the validity of this heart-breaking sophism, and went on constructing or reconstructing his sacrosanct Empire. The elect people of Rome, bathed in the blood of the vanquished nations and besprinkled too with the blood of the Divine Lamb, was the depositary of the divine authority on earth; yet there was no need for the Roman Emperor to be by birth or race a Roman, since such necessity had not been recognized by the ancient Romans themselves, and legitimacy in Dante's time rested with the German war-lords. He had known the wicked Florentines and an unholy Pontiff; he did not know those unkempt barbarians clad in iron and fur and could like them as he could like things and beings that were beyond his personal experience. He did not remember, if he had ever known, that the most impressive of those barbarians, Frederick Barbarossa, had been defeated, only a century before Dante's birth, by a League of the Italian free communes and driven back from the plains of Lombardy to the ridge of the Alps. This feat, in which the real Italy of the new ages had shown her stupendous readiness for a spontaneous and creative life, had no place in Dante's mind; or he would have blamed it. Nay, he remembered with glee that Barbarossa had punished and razed rebellious Milan; he forgot altogether about Milan's resurrection and the battle of Legnano. As the imperial authority was more and more on the wane, he the more resolutely sided with it, a reactionary captured in the tangles of the past. A German Emperor, Henry VII, came to Italy during Dante's exile, with the purpose of stifling resistance and establishing the universality of his power. He was one of the best and one

of the weakest. Dante heralded very loudly his glory and righteousness; he also performed the most extravagant of his deeds when he addressed the "most wicked Florentines" with an epistle in which he urged them to open the gates of their city to the legitimate sire of the world. They did not open the gates. The Florentine republic lived on, and the German Roman Cæsar died mysteriously somewhere in Tuscany. He had an honourable burial in the Ghibelline city of Pisa, and a distinguished seat in Dante's Paradise.

Although beaten in his immediate hope, Dante did not surrender his conviction. He took the chance, offered by an unwelcome political holiday, to finish *The Divine Comedy*, which so far had lagged, and to die with at least something accomplished. As to his political system, it became, if possible, even more steadfast. He had now gone all the way through from the hereditary and conventional Guelphism of his family and city, which should have made of him a partisan of the Holy See, to a radical Ghibellinism, which sought absolute imperial authority, unchecked and unshared by any other power on earth and directly inspired by God. The ultimate axioms upon which his system of Monarchy reposed are as valid, even to the modern mind, as most of the corollaries that he pretended to deduce from them are crudely wrong. There is nothing to object to in Dante's first principle: namely, that human civilization has a unitary goal, and that such goal is the perfectibility of the human mind, in knowledge as well as in action. The second axiom also seems easily acceptable: that, in order to strive towards that unitary goal, universal peace is required, and that universal peace is impossible without a unitary political organization of mankind. But it was mere superstition to assume that such organization had to be the Roman Empire, possibly in the person of a German lord, an enlightened despot miraculously bestowing freedom, holiness, and all sorts of blessings on all men, and that communes and nations, Florence and France and England, could and should be weeded out as rank grass. There is a definitely modern trend in Dante when he assumes that the politi-

cal and social organization must be self-sufficient and not depend on the approval of the Church; but since he could not afford to become a heretic, neither could he go so far as to proclaim religious freedom and tolerance. The Roman Church still was to him the depositary of eternal truth and the bestower of eternal happiness. There might arise a conflict between the requirements for eternal happiness, about which the Church was infallible, and those for earthly welfare and justice, the infallibility of which lay with the Empire. Which of the two had to prevail? In other words, which was the ultimately infallible infallibility? Dante has no answer. He sees the Emperor, although going straight ahead on his own way, paying dutiful reverence to the Holy Father, such as the son owes to his earthly father. This kind of homage may in practice prove to be little more than lip service. He also visualizes both powers, the lay and the sacerdotal, as two parallels, never coinciding with, and never departing from, each other, both equally emanations from the same source, which is God. But should either of the two deviate from its course and run aslant, who would have the power of knowing and prescribing the return to the right track? None but God and Dante. Because God is God and Dante is His prophet. The objective unity of the world, which he so passionately longed for, could not exist in the final analysis anywhere save in the individual arbitration of Dante's mind.

Now the definitive Dante had been born: the man to whom no one may be compared in certitude of knowledge and resoluteness of desire. The outcast had become a high priest; the Homeric beggar, the wealthiest of all kings.

Hence the astonishing compactness of *The Divine Comedy*, a building larger and firmer than any labyrinthine palace. It sheltered in its core not one but two Minotaurs: the twin superstitions of the Roman Empire and of Catholic mythology.



## Italy

IF ROME was at the centre of all his imagination and speculation, why did not Dante write *The Divine Comedy* in the language of Rome, in the Latin that was the language of Empire and Church? If his dream and thought were to have, as he wanted them to have, universal validity, why did he not choose the universal language, Latin?

He wrote in Latin the treatise about Monarchy, a certain number of political epistles, a few minor compositions in verse or prose. He also began in Latin an elaborate work whose purpose was to demonstrate how and why the vernacular idiom was superior to Latin, and why, consequently, he had adopted it for his *Comedy*. He did not bring the work to an end. Probably, for all his fortitude, he was discouraged by an obscure consciousness that the reasons he offered were all but quibbles. He had gone so far as to fancy—and to serve up that fancy as scientific knowledge—that the vernacular idioms had existed prior to Latin, which was an artificial language, composed in later ages. At the same time he supposed, with his usual pride, that the language of his poetry was not at all the Florentine vernacular, the language of a particular community and of the one he most hated, but a sublime and almost angelical combination of the best elements that could be found in all the vernaculars of all the regions of Italy.

Why of Italy alone? Why did he not try putting together all the elements that seemed fitted, in no matter what language, no matter where spoken?

There is no reasonable answer to such questions. There is no logical or philological solution of the problem concerning Dante's choice of a language for his poem. The only answer available

is of a psychological nature and implies another paradox in Dante's biography.

According to a unanimous opinion, which Dante enthusiastically shared, Virgil had been the greatest of Latin poets, and therefore the greatest of all poets, without any qualification. To write a new poem in the same language as Virgil's meant rivalry with Virgil. Fear, a remnant of juvenile morbidity, together with reverence, caused Dante to shrink before that ambition. But irrepressible pride pushed him to strive for his own primacy. A new language, not yet honoured by first-rate poets, fitted the requirements both of his timidity and of his ambition. Then he passed on to rationalizing his instinctive choice. The language he adopted was indeed the Florentine vernacular, which he had first learned to stammer on his mother's lap; whatever elements he added from his experience as an exile, wandering over divers regions of Central and Northern Italy, or as a Latin scholar, were hardly enough to justify the pretence of having shaped, or discovered, a celestial language of his own. The same is true of the violent distortions to which he, following his rebellious moods and hunting after the expression of the ineffable, subjected the colloquial grammar of the Florentine idiom. They were conducive only to form the one among modern literary languages which was the most refractory to the plain uses of science, of realism, of prose, the most inexorably bent towards the sublimity of song and declamation.

Now that pyramid stood in the middle of the horizon. It exerted a steadily increasing attraction over the things and spirits around it.

The effect was startling. *The Divine Comedy* created a nation.

Dante never had such a purpose in mind. His life had moved between a negative and a positive pole: hatred for the walled city of Florence, love for the boundless universal empire of all mankind. Whatever stood between, kingdoms like France and England, nations or principalities, he either cursed or ignored. But having set his aim at the absolute, the arrow of his desire hit

somewhere half-way, in relativity. The impulses of history drove the world, during those centuries, toward national unities; the arrow of Dante's desire fell, against his will, where those world-wide impulses bent its course. The might and weight of that desire attracted around it the spiritual elements that were already, although confusedly, at work. Thus Italy was born: a compromise between the infinite and a city, between eternity and the daily news.

There had been no Italy before Dante. The Italian historians who, especially during the Fascist era, have laboured to prove that there was an Italy, as a fully national organism, already, during the Roman Empire, are better patriots than historians. Some Roman institutions were extended, gradually, to the regions between the Alps and the Strait of Messina some time before passing to the rest of the world; but that is far from enough to build the substance of a national life. The Roman language conquered, more or less exclusively, all of the peninsula; but it conquered also, approximately at the same time, other countries of Europe and Africa. As soon—and it happened very soon—as the Roman Emperors ceased to be necessarily Romans, the supreme power was conceded indiscriminately to Spaniards and other foreigners. There was no intermediate Italian stage between the Roman period and the universal development of the Empire. The name itself, Italy, which in remote antiquity had designated only a small strip of land along the shore of the Southern Sea, had later spread rather erratically to other regions, until at last it became the denomination of all the peninsula from the mountain ridge to the Strait of Messina; but it had never comprised, before Dante, Sicily or the other large islands in the Western Mediterranean.

Not all historical events afford a clear-cut logical explanation. There are exceptions and accidents in human as well as in natural history. After the collapse of the Roman world Empire a biological law, whose effectiveness is still dramatically visible today, pushed its scattered elements toward partial conglomerations.

tions, which were to become the national states of this modern age. No such process had fully materialized in the ancient Mediterranean world, despite some hints of it noticeable in Egypt, in Greece, and especially in Palestine. About six centuries after the downfall of Rome this medieval process towards the modern national states was virtually mature in several zones of Europe. It may be likened to the formation of a new set of celestial bodies from a disintegrating sun. It was an attempt of nature at building human societies which were to surpass the narrowness of the tribe or of the city while renouncing the ultimate end of a world state, which the catastrophe of the Roman Empire had proved so far unattainable.

There is no reason why this process was abortive in the country we call Italy, or the reasons are too many. Metaphorically one can say that those fragments of the split sun which circled in the immediate neighbourhood of what was left of the sun itself were under such emanations of energy, both centripetal and centrifugal, that they could not settle down into a new partial unity and were fated to revolve around Rome in an incandescent and nearly chaotic condition. The eternal or holy city of Rome, never thoroughly destroyed, was in the midst of the peninsula; the Christian Church, which had taken the place of the ancient Empire, was supposedly a merely spiritual organism, but it also was convulsed with a relentless eagerness towards a universal political embodiment, which always failed, but the hope of which was unshakably maintained against every failure; on the other hand, the Empire, or its idea, was not entirely dead, and the country, a dramatic cemetery, was haunted by these two familiar ghosts. Besides, the North and South of the peninsula had never totally merged, not even under the Roman rule. Their economic and spiritual differences became more apparent during the separation of the Middle Ages; and while Naples became the capital of a southern state, developing along the same directions which had worked successfully in France and England, this southern Italian state was too backward in comparison with northern cities like

Florence and Venice, so that its ambition of uniting the peninsula was condemned from the beginning to flat defeat. The kingdoms in the North, those hasty structures heaped topsy-turvy by Goths and Longobards and other barbarians, had suffered an early collapse; the tiny organisms, communes and principalities which had arisen from this second disintegration, were endowed each with a violent and seemingly irrepressible energy of its own. Some of them weakened enough to yield to some other more powerful than they; none of them grew so powerful as to absorb all the others. Any process towards unification of Central and Northern Italy was thwarted by the striving energies of their single components.

It is futile to assume, according to the philosophy of history taught by a few self-satisfied professors, that whatever has happened in history was good and necessary. One can very well imagine a history of modern Italy different from the course that it actually took, and equally possible. One constituent of this hypothetical history would have been, as it was in actual history, the united kingdom of Southern Italy and Sicily; the second constituent would have been a small papal state around Rome; the third, and most important, a federation of the northern and central cities and signorie, stretching from Venice to Genoa, from Milan to Florence and further down, with their oversea possessions and empires. Such a federation would have been strong enough to resist the covetousness of France and Spain, to ensure the independence and prosperity of all Italy as the Flemings and Dutch did in their country, and also to use the genius of the navigators partly at least to the advantage of Italy. The intellectual and artistic creativeness of the centuries from the thirteenth to the sixteenth would not have been any less prodigious; on the contrary, the political and social prosperity would have enhanced it and delayed its dusk, since the belief, or superstition, is also groundless, according to which there is no spiritual greatness, in individuals or nations, without ruin and despair. The civilization of Northern Italy would have spread to the South, bind-

ing the two halves of the country by a tie of solidarity profitable to both, without subjecting them to an unnatural unity. The papal state would have become something like the Mecca of a popular religion commonly observed by the masses in the North and South, while the leading classes, at least in the North, far more advanced in culture than the nobility and bourgeoisie of the other European countries, would have developed a free philosophical religion, beyond Catholicism and Protestantism.

This quite reasonable Utopia could easily have materialized had not the natural development of Italian civilization been hampered by another and quite unreasonable Utopia: the resurrection of ancient times, and the revival of the Roman Empire. Up to a certain time the visible and invisible presence of the Roman universal idea had only impaired the development of Italy towards a modern unified nation; it had had the negative effect of an obstacle, without being harmful to the other and no less natural course that the Italian people had taken. From a certain moment on, the Roman universal idea and the complaint about the vanished glory of the past became the positive impulses of the leading classes. Dante drove these into the Italian mind. For all his greatness, and with all his greatness, he distorted the soul of his people, urging it to dislike whatever it had or might have had and to love a goal which nature and history reproved.

Already in other times a gigantic individuality had been, or was to be, decisive for the destiny of an entire nation. But Moses, Cyrus, Solon, and all the others had been legislators and warriors; Luther and Calvin themselves were far from being mere theologians and preachers, and the severe test to which they put their doctrines in the administration of a city or in an actual struggle with the powers of the earth helped them to surround and support their doctrines with the guarantees and limitations of practical life. But Dante was no conqueror, no legislator; no real responsibility of action stopped the flight of his imagination, or qualified the absoluteness of his symmetries. Whatever hap-

pened to him happened in the unrestrained sublimity and freedom of his mind. There the Italian nation was born: a phantom.

Incapable of rising to a real life for itself, this phantom, however, was mighty enough to block henceforth the road to a living Italy of modern times. It had what phantoms may have and poets may give: a speech and a myth. Its substance was a craving for the absolute in a political and social emptiness, an unavoidable, tragic destiny.

## *Cola di Rienzo*

THE tragedy of Dante was followed by the tragic farce of Cola di Rienzo, played in Rome from 1347 to 1354, roughly a generation after Dante.

The hero was a Roman commoner, Nicholas of Lawrence, the son of an inn-keeper. He learned Latin; he became a notary and a writer of eloquent epistles, an inflammatory orator, a rebellious leader; and after having twice gained power in the holy city, whence the popes had gone as voluntary exiles to France, he was murdered by a riotous mob. His corpse was hanged and burned.

His story was retold in recent times by Gabriele d'Annunzio, whose biography of *Cola di Rienzo*, brief but not at all concise, was published shortly before 1910. It is one of the least read among d'Annunzio's books in Italy, and it has been entirely neglected abroad, owing to the total lack of new historical discoveries and to the rigid mannerism of its style. But from another point of view it is an uncannily arresting book.

It seems as if d'Annunzio, in a moment of frustration and weariness, unaware of the impending World War and of the opportunities that were soon to be offered to his lust for adventure and power, wanted to dig up his vain dream of Roman glory and to scatter it to the four winds. Cola di Rienzo, the visionary plebeian, had felt like him, and had fallen in blood and shame. The booklet is the revenge of d'Annunzio against the nothingness of his own dreams.

Incidentally he points to the futility of exhuming things dead for ever; it seems, although obscurely, as if he now thought that Roman glory was irrevocably of the past. Insistently and cruelly he contends that, even had the revival of Rome been theoretically possible, it could never have been the feat of such a hero as Cola, whom he depicts as a wanton, a glutton, a coward, of all heroes the shabbiest.

Yet Cola was better than his portraitist paints him; and as far as political ideals and methods are concerned, he was better than the portraitist himself. Neither was he so good as Konrad Burdach and other fanciful scholars have of late depicted him; but he genuinely believed for many moments of his life—and they were long, decisive moments—in the things which he said. He died for them, and no farce which ends in blood and fire is entirely a farce.

The idea of human and political perfection, as definitely formulated by Dante, had now quickly spread into various layers of cultivated society. It was more than the dawn of the Renaissance, this strangest among the mystical attitudes of man. Petrarch, the new great poet, had become the mouthpiece of Dante's idea, on which he conferred a tinge of worldly elegance, of easy essayism, nay, of journalistic advertisement, that made the idea more conveyable to the common mind. He translated an austere religion into the language of conversation and declamation, and toned down its heroic despair to a soft melancholy, palatable to all and not even contradictory to the suggestions of a dreamy idleness. He walked along the mossy and grassy ruins of ancient Rome,



where goats would graze, and occasionally sighed: "Italy mine, although it is vain to speak . . ."

There are founders of religions, among them Dante; and there are founders of fashions, among them Petrarch. The latter are the mightier, especially when they are as consistent and at the same time as benevolent as was Petrarch. He was, from a literary point of view, more consistent than Dante, in whose language and attitudes he found something uncouth; he learned Latin far better than his predecessor, and wrote in Latin his big epic, *Africa*, celebrating the victory of Rome in the Carthaginian wars, which virtually implied the establishment of the Roman rule over all the known world. He also, more consistently than Dante, developed from the Dantean idea a dogma of national primacy. If Rome and Italy were the essence of the world, why should saviours and emperors come from barbaric lands? A proud and tender nationalism became very early his faith and remained the only continuity of his soul, whose musical benevolence and lack of anger or hatred, whose inexhaustible ability to translate the imperfection of will into the perfection of song, helped him meet with comparative smoothness all disillusionments and to become the idol of a new-born nation which seemed headed toward the destiny of assuaging an incurable restlessness through the beauty of artistic forms.

As long as it was possible, Petrarch took Cola di Rienzo very seriously, and supported him with bulwarks of resonant words. The Roman scribe, after all a Latin scholar and his colleague, was to him what the crowned Emperor and the allegorical hound had been to Dante. His letters to him and to the Roman people are stirring. "This man, believe me, was sent to you Roman people by Heaven. You must venerate him as the rarest gift of God; I beseech you to offer your lives for his safety." Or to Cola himself: "In the midst of the world, and upon the peak of an abrupt mountain, I deemed I saw thee so sublime as almost to touch the sky. Compared to that height all other mountains which I saw or heard of seemed as low as the lowest valleys. . . . Thou

wast surrounded by a company of valiant men, among whom thou, sitting on a luminous cliff, shonest in thy superhuman beauty so resplendent and august that the sun itself envied thee. . . ." And again: "When I remember the grave and holy things which thou saidst to me, the day before yesterday, on the threshold of that ancient church, it is to me as if I had listened to a sacred oracle, to a god, not to a man. . . ."

What the hero and the poet had talked about was the decadence and ruin of the Roman republic and their plans for the future. "Oh, if that could happen in my days! Oh, if I could take part in so great an enterprise, in such a glory!" They both wanted, with united souls, the resurrection of Rome, and they deemed it possible; and while performing the magic operation, they dreamed that the revived city should and could be greater and more beautiful than she had ever been in her first life. Rome, the holy and eternal, was to be the source not only of terrestrial power but also of eternal truth, the seat of the universal Emperor and of the universal Pope, the City of Man and the City of God. The Roman people, entrusted with a mystical mission of which no racial explanation was offered as yet, preserved in the shrine of its theological and historical instinct the secret of the original and final unity.

Even if we had no record of the religious trend of Cola's mind, we could easily infer that he was attracted by a doctrine bordering on heresy. This doctrine, which Dante too had cherished, had been more than foreshadowed by a Southerner of the twelfth century, the Abbot Joachim of Floris in Calabria. It was the prophecy of a third and conclusive epoch of history, after the epoch of the Father and the epoch of the Son. The third epoch was to be under the sign of the Holy Ghost, and it was to bring about all fulfilment. Cola di Rienzo, in the time which he spent in religious solitude, contemplated that prophecy, and imbued himself with its spirit; he acted politically under the combined vision of a new earth and a new heaven, an imperial and celestial perfection in the spirit of Dante.

He was, in the year 1347, the Tribune of Rome, "Nicholaus Severus et Clemens, by the grace of Our most merciful Lord Jesus Christ, Tribune of liberty, peace, and justice, Liberator of the Holy Roman Republic." He reigned on behalf of the people, and for the people, humiliating the barons and large landowners and inspiring the populace with the feeling of its collective majesty and responsibility. He failed to overpower the allied oppositions, and only by a hair's-breadth was he able to save his life in flight. But he did not surrender, and after years of wanderings and meditations he succeeded in finding a way back: a resurrected self. The triumph was as astonishing—and empty—as it had been the first time; but the second fall was deadly. It also happened in a lamentable way. Before being seized and slaughtered he had managed to disguise himself as a peasant and to mix with the infuriated mob, shouting as all the others did: "Down with the traitor!" Humiliation and renunciation preceded the sacrifice, which lacked, at least in the costume and setting, the purification of tragic grandeur.

Its farcical element consists in the disproportion between the size of the single man and the hugeness of the purpose. It is clearly of a Quixotic nature. As Don Quixote, having read the chivalric romances, wanted life to be the kind of life that was depicted therein, so Cola di Rienzo, incapable of drawing a line of demarcation between dream and daylight, wanted to transmute the architecture of *The Divine Comedy* and the music of Petrarch's verse into things of flesh and blood.

If Don Quixote (and Dante too) died in a comfortable bed, whereas Cola perished of cold iron and hot flame, the difference is only accidental. Dante was lucky enough to choose finally the task of a writer and to keep aloof from all circumstances which might have let him fall into the hands of the Florentines. As for Don Quixote, if he had been a real knight errant in the Spain of King Philip instead of the immaterial puppet of a novelist's imagination, he would easily have died a more dramatic death.

## *Machiavelli*

**A**NOTHER Cola or Nicholaus, Niccolò Machiavelli, might perhaps have written a political *Don Quixote* a couple of centuries after Cola di Rienzo, and roughly a century before Cervantes, although not with that peaceable and lax kind of humour.

He was a Florentine of the spiritual stock of Dante, the greatest writer next to him, equally persevering in thought, equally dry and resolute in word. But he was the Anti-Dante. Whatever had been poetry to Dante was prose to him. Whatever he wrote was prose, even if occasionally in metrical form.

Ambition and bitterness were his chief inspirations, as they had been Dante's. Political failure was to him, too, the unwelcome opportunity for his genius as a writer. For him too, love and hope had preceded failure, wrath, and intellectual revenge. But his love was different from Dante's: not quickly soaring toward the angelic and absolute, but firmly grasping, so long as they were tenable, the actual gifts of actual life. Besides, he was too virile to idolize woman as a messenger and image of God; she, quite terrestrial, held a very subordinate place in his mind.

He did not believe in any God. He was honestly convinced that he believed only in things which he touched and saw, although he believed in prodigies and portents because the ancient Romans had believed in them. Among the things which he touched and saw, and the dearest of them, were his native Florence and his native Italy: his beloved earth. But he also believed in things which nobody ever touched and saw; he also had a religion. It was inspired by the immediate reaction of his enthusiasm to the greatness of human nature in the courage of its strug-

gle, regardless of the purpose; this was the feature of man which he called "virtue." His admiration for it, combined with his pretence of not considering anything beyond the actual reality of things, gives to the prose of this idealistic atheist a frantic, almost unbearable vibration, which the level exposition of matters of fact never appeases.

Where did he learn his desperate hero-worship? His heroes belong to the kin of Michelangelo's Prisoners, but they also remind us of Dante's Titans, whose steadfastness of character challenges even the despair of Hell.

A legend, more true than truth, reports that before his death (on June 22, 1527) Machiavelli had a dream in which he chose rather to go to Hell and have the company of philosophers and heroes than to visit the dull company of Heaven.

Paradise and Purgatory were to him fogs of the dark ages. Truth was in the flaming clarity of Hell, and the earth itself, not only its hidden core, was Hell. The book in which he ought to have most delighted should have been the *Iliad*, at least as it has been interpreted by hurried readers.

The schemes of political perfection and stability constructed by Dante and other medieval teachers were also nothingness. Those people were not content with one Paradise in heaven; they dreamed also of peace and justice on earth; they wanted two Paradises, and there is none.

But one of Machiavelli's vital contradictions lay in the impossibility for him to quiet down to an indifferent, unconcerned contemplation of human events. His cynicism, a wall of ice, did not extinguish his love for motherland and glory.

In spite of all despair he had a plan, a purpose. It was no longer the universal and eternal structure of Dante's Monarchy. What Dante had hoped for was now less than dust. The Empire was a mere word, the Roman Church was rent by heresy outside, by scepticism and corruption inside, and no cultivated mind, save out of fear or habit, could bow before its dogmas and discipline.

What was real was the rise and struggle of the nations, which

Dante had overlooked or condemned. Not the world emperor with his world priest, but the kings with their horsemen had conquered the earth. Among those kings, against those kings, there was no king of Italy; the place of Italy was blank among the nations.

The king of France had conquered Italy with chalk, without a shot. Stopping during the unbelievable parade, his officials had marked with white chalk the lodgings they had chosen for the troops. Then came the turn of Spain. French, Spaniards, Swiss fought among themselves, contending for the prey; the Italians had some gallant skirmishes, some individual and local *gestes*, but their liberty was perishing without even the honour of a battle like the battle of Cheronæa, where the destiny of republican Greece had been buried under the sign of the lion. Thus at least Machiavelli saw the events.

Was there still a remedy? In that dusk he wrote *The Prince*.

Many think it unfair to judge Machiavelli's mind and soul from *The Prince* alone. But this little book is his immortality. The rest of what he wrote would have given him a place among the first-rate writers and historians of Italy; it would not have lifted him to the rank of those few representative spirits who have created or destroyed world-values.

His discovery—a devastating one if it were true—is that political activity is independent of morals and religion. The Dantean unity is shattered. Force, and cunning, which is one aspect of force, rule the world. Satan's is the earth.

The principle had never been pronounced with such resoluteness before. Even in the *Iliad* Achilles himself is capable of tenderness and remorse, the kings speak of wisdom, the poet knows about sin and punishment and subjects the fighting passions of heroes and heroines to a superior inescapable justice. Cruelty, treachery, violation of the given word, mercilessness toward the outcast and wanderer, were stifled at the early dawn of our civilization no less than they were after the rise of Christianity, and

the sacredness of embassies and treaties hinted at a universal human law which was by no means the law of the jungle. The Greek philosophers, and not only Plato, developed a consistently Platonic speculation about an ideal republic which should embody an ethical and religious commandment. The prophets of Israel visioned an ultimate end, of justice and peace, the Kingdom of God; and not even Rome, in the midst of conquest and plunder, ever dismissed the common thought of the ancient civilization, of which she was the legitimate heir.

Now Machiavelli suppressed the horizon. Not the sky, but the earth, was to him the limit. It seems also very likely that he was responsible for the introduction of the word "State" in its modern meaning, instead of the terms city, or republic, or monarchy, which had been used in former ages: a hard, cold word, with its frightful implications of sheer possession and power. At the head of the state is the Prince, another icy word, meaning only primacy and power, without any connexion with mission and love.

The opposition to Christ and Dante is more than implicit. "Disarmed prophets," he writes with a grin, "perish, and armed prophets triumph." The beasts that had represented the human vices and damnations in medieval symbolism are now glorified as heraldic signs of the highest political virtues. The Prince of Machiavelli must be a lion and at the same time a fox.

Almost at the nethermost pit of Hell, *Inferno* XXVII, Dante had staged the dramatic short story of Guido da Montefeltro. This damned soul had been a man of arms, but more than that, a politician. "Whilst I was in the form of bones and pulp, which my mother gave me, my deeds were not those of the lion, but of the fox." Then he repented, and when he came to that period of age "at which everyone should lower sails and gather in his ropes," he became a monk, and it would have availed him. But Pope Boniface VIII, who was at war with the Colonna family and wanted to seize their stronghold Palestrina, remembered that the pious Franciscan had been an expert in all wiles and covert ways. He sent for him and asked him for advice, promis-

ing beforehand absolution from the sin which Guido's suggestion might possibly entail. The monk's suggestion was of an elementary Machiavellian nature; he counselled the Pope to offer an amnesty to the Colonna, without any intention of observing the promise. Indeed, when the Colonnese surrendered on those conditions, their stronghold was razed to the ground.

"Saint Francis afterwards came for me; but one of the Black Cherubim said to him: 'Do not take him; wrong me not. He must come down amongst my menials; because he gave the fraudulent counsel, since which I have kept him fast by his hair (for he who repents not, cannot be absolved; nor is it possible to repent and will a thing at the same time, the contradiction not permitting it.)' O wretched me! how I started when he seized me, saying to me: 'Maybe thou didst not think that I was a logician.'"

In the particular case it is too bad that the devil was a professor of logic, whereas Saint Francis, humble and meek, as becomes him, was not even a sophomore in that pugnacious science. A jesuitic casuist would have found an objection subtle enough to steal Guido's soul from the clutches of the devil: let alone that the sinner was too cunning to have died before settling his account with Paradise.

There is an echo of the same Dantean mood in the following canto, where the pilgrim of Hell meets the accursed soul of Mosca de' Lamberti, the conspirator who, having suggested the assassination of Buondelmonte, started the Florentine civil wars. "Thou wilt recollect the Mosca too, ah me! who said: 'A thing once done is done with!'"—which was the seed of evil to the Tuscan people."

These two counsels of ruthless fraud and ruthless violence are famous in (the almost magical appeal of their mysterious wording: "large promise with performance small"—"a thing once done is done with!") But Machiavelli would have had nothing to object; and, knowingly or not, he put the foundations of his terrestrial City in Dante's Inferno. Guido da Montefeltro and Mosca de' Lamberti were good princes and statesmen, accord-



ing to his theory of statesmanship; obviously, the idea that morals and religion had something to do with practical action was medieval superstition to him; and there is no Hell, except servitude and defeat.

He went, as he proverbially said, after the actual reality of things rather than after their imagination; the statesman, he contends, "who minds what things ought to be instead of what they really are, learns the ways of his disaster and not those of his preservation; since a man who wants to be in everything good must perforce be ruined among so many who are not good." He tackled in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince* the problem of the way in which the princes must observe the faith. The answer is clear. It would be desirable to be loyal and fair; to fight according to the laws is human, while to fight only with force and cunning is beastly. But, since the first way often does not suffice, it becomes necessary to have recourse to the second. "In conclusion a prince must care about winning and maintaining the state; the means thereto will be always judged honourable, and everybody shall praise them; because the mob must be taken with things that are apparent, and there is nothing in the world but mob." "There is a prince, our contemporary," he proceeds, "whom I shall not name, and who preaches nothing but peace and honour, although he is an enemy at heart of peace and honour, which, if he had observed them, would have robbed him several times of reputation and state." The unnamed prince was the Spanish ruler Ferdinand. From that time on the charge of hypocrisy was constantly repeated against whosoever, France or Britain, Holy Alliance or League of Nations, claimed to top the crude reality of life with the emblems of eternal principles.

This metaphysical despair fills all the pages of Machiavelli's *Prince*, his Anti-Gospel, his Evil News. "Therefore one shall keep in mind that men must either be caressed or killed, since they take revenge of slight offences; but they cannot do so with grave ones; so that any offence made to a man must be such that no fear of revenge shall be left." "War cannot be abolished; it

may only be deferred, but to the other's advantage." "It is a thing indeed natural and ordinary to lust for acquisition; and those who have that lust and the force thereto will always be praised and not blamed; only when lust is without power, are there blame and error." "Offences should be committed at once all together, so that, there being less time to taste them, they may offend less; on the contrary, beneficences must be done little by little, in order that there may be more time to savour them." The best of all would be if a prince could be both loved and feared; but if only one of the two is possible, then "it is safer that he be feared rather than loved."

Conquest and success are the only standards of political life. Ariosto, the gentle poet, echoed with the flourish of his two lines: "Whether one wins by luck or shrewdness, a victory has always been a praiseworthy thing." Coldly or passionately, a swarm of other writers, in prose or verse, joined the choir.

The ideal figure of the Prince was complete in Machiavelli's mind. He had resolute, cold intelligence in his head and ruthless force in his arm. The arm was the army. This is one of the most insistent points in Machiavelli's inquiry and doctrine: namely, that the Italian cities and signorie had been ruined by the use of mercenary, professional forces. He set all his hope for the future in the institution of standing armies, belonging directly to the prince and not to the professional chieftain, whose services could be hired by anybody and whose interest lay in the preservation and safe-keeping of his merchandise for sale, not with the heroic sacrifice of his fighting herd.

His demonstration that professional captains and their men-at-arms could not be as good in battle as a national regular army seems theoretically obvious; but, practically, all armies were more or less mercenary until the French Revolution, and the Machiavellian idea of standing armies, far from being a real innovation, was an abstract, neo-classic inference from what he supposed, questionably enough, to understand in the military history of ancient Rome. That demonstration, moreover, carried a fate-

ful implication. It tended to disparage the condottieri and their Italian troops. He wrote in *The Prince* that "they used every kind of industry to get rid of toil and danger, not killing each other in battle, but taking each other prisoner and without even a ransom." In another book, *The Florentine Histories*, he gave spectacular pictures, which became famous all over the world, of some typical Italian battles of the Renaissance. One is the battle of Molinella, 1467: "The captains of the Florentines rushed closer to the enemy, so that they came to a regular fight, which lasted half a day, without either of the two parts yielding. Nevertheless no one died; only a few horses were wounded, and a few prisoners taken." Another is the battle of Zagonara, 1424. "In so great a rout, highly advertised all over Italy, only Lodovico degli Obizi died, together with two of his men, who, having fallen from horseback, drowned in the mud." Both reports are false, passionate lies of Machiavelli himself. In the battle of Molinella alone, where, following the lines of the Machiavellian caricature, one would like to say that nobody was killed and somebody was born, the valour and fierceness of the fighters were, according to more truthful witnesses, unsurpassed; it was one of the bloodiest engagements of those times; at least three hundred men—others say eight hundred, others one thousand—and four hundred horses were killed.

It was not the two men of Lodovico degli Obizi who drowned in the mud at the real battle of Zagonara; Italian military honour died in the mud at the fantastic Machiavellian battles. For centuries after, down to the present day, the Italians have complained bitterly about their reputation abroad; a feeling of humiliation and revolt against the dishonour of such a reputation is one of the secrets which explain much of Italian national and international history in recent times. A stereotyped image of the average Italian was circulated, during at least four centuries, among foreign mobs; it was also accepted by a few minor historians, novelists, and poets. He, the typical Italian, was represented as a good artist, good singer, good dancer, good lover;

at an upper level, as a bright intelligence, a glowing imagination, a man of subtle reasoning and sweeping eloquence; for the rest, as a man without human character, without pride and law, destitute of moral loyalty and physical courage.

But is it fair, and is it possible, to trace back to foreign slanderers this calumny, which, while it offends the Italian nation, offends also the spirit of brotherhood and mutual understanding among nations? On the contrary, almost all that has been said in praise of the Italian character belongs to foreign poets and travellers; the Italians themselves specialized in the vilifying of themselves; and it is no great wonder if many foreigners, upon hearing or reading their ceaseless outbursts of self-contempt, felt at last compelled to accept their word.

It was not a Frenchman or a Briton who first provided the Italians with their inferiority complex; it was their greatest poet, Dante. Neither was it a Spaniard or a German who completed Dante's work; it was the greatest of their prose writers, Machiavelli. To be sure, life in Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was no Paradise; but it is an old adage that says that even the devil is not so black as he is painted. Had life been, in medieval and communal Italy, as utterly atrocious, as morally despicable, as Dante depicts it, who could explain the æsthetic and mystical beauty born out of that alleged misery? Italy as a symbol was sacred to Dante, but the Italians were anathema to him. Siena, Lucca, Arezzo, all the Tuscan cities, let alone his own damned Florence, were pouches of Hell on the surface of the earth; as for Pisa, it was unfortunate—so he thought—that the islands off the Tyrrhenian coast could not move towards the coast and close the mouth of the river Arno in order that the surging flood might choke the Pisans one and all. Not even the sweetness of the Tuscan landscape suggests to him any sweetness of words; except for the murmur of some mountain brooks, whose echo occasionally sounds to his fiery thirst, he remembers only iron, flame, and curse.

To be sure, Machiavelli is also consciously and purposely an

Anti-Dante. But too many elements of the Dantean mentality came over to him. Not only heroism, majesty in thinking and willing, his virility of hope in spite of despair, and that never-surrendering, almost religious belief in the highest value of form and expression; he took also from him, and from the others who had followed him, that baleful inheritance of the Roman—or, more generally, the classical—political mythology. The present, when it was not a Hell, was to him as well as to Dante a cemetery, a whiteness guarded by a hope of resurrection. Nothing really beautiful and great had ever happened since the decline and fall of the ancient civilization. The summary of world-history might have been contained for him too in the words which a later poet lent to the Chorus in his tragedy of Antiquity resurrected: "All that ever happens—now in the Present—sounds like a mournful echo—of the grander days of the Fathers." He too might have been of the populace who—in the story retold by Burckhardt—rushed madly toward the spot, somewhere amid the ruins of ancient Rome, where the corpse of a Roman girl, strangely preserved by the centuries, had been suddenly unearthed: under the assumption that a woman of those marvellous times should be far lovelier than any living woman, that only in the days of the Fathers had beauty been godlike.

The living Italians were tied with the dead, and their souls breathed dust. Machiavelli too, for all his realism, missed the essential reality; and his nostalgia, lacking Dante's Christian faith and Dante's belief in the lawful and purposive organization of the universe, was far deadlier than Dante's. It is only a momentary illusion to suppose that he would have been able to write a kind of *Don Quixote*; or it should have been a tragic autobiography. His start is anti-Dantean; he honestly feels that he is fighting off mystical, or medieval, or wishful thinking. But at the final test he is much less of a realist than Dante himself. Indeed, if Dante's mythology was bad, his religion was excellent; if he was wrong as a believer in the Roman Empire and its resurrection, he was perfectly right as a believer in the moral forces that rule the

world. His tenet, that the meaning and aim of history is the perfectibility of human intellect and will, is a fundamental postulate of human reason; the deductions about freedom, justice, and peace in the social unity of mankind are flawlessly rigorous. Since he knew those truths, he knew a part of reality, and he was for that part a realist. That he composed a Utopia with a shadow of the Past and a mirage of the North, on whose shore he dreamed that he might safely land—therein lay his error; a minor one, however, if compared to Machiavelli's. The latter discarded, together with Dante's mythology of the Holy Empire, his human religion, preserving only an adoration of glory and "virtue"; moreover, he clung to a part, and the worst at that, of that Roman mythology, and drifted towards an interpretation of history in which elemental and often brutish forces are paramount. But a Utopia is a Nowhere projected into the future; it finally may prove a Sometime and Anywhere; whereas a reactionary nostalgia, like Machiavelli's, is inescapably a Nowhere and Never.

Possessing now in due form the recipe for his Prince, he set to work trying strenuously to substantiate the recipe into some kind of living reality. He had the chemical, or alchemical, formula for political and national life. It must be easy to draw real life out of the formula of real life.

Bent on that work, he looks like Faust's assistant Wagner, who, knowing scientifically about the nature of man, tried sedulously to create a man in the heat of his furnace, in the void of his phial: *Homunculus*.

The man of Machiavelli was the scientific statesman or prince: *Homunculus politicus*. How was he to be born? If the assumption of Machiavelli was true that the only standard of political action and political doctrine is failure or success, his doctrine and action too must stand that trial.

They failed.

As prince and king of Italy he would fain have chosen even the black devil. He chose the man nearest to the devil whom historic reality offered to his experiments: Cesare Borgia, not even an

Italian, an adventurer of Spanish blood, the bastard of a pope, a half-genius, a half-hero, a Lilliputian Alexander or Napoleon, but wholly a traitor, an assassin, an incendiary, a sacrilegious and incestuous monster. Supported by the crimes and murders of his father, Pope Alexander VI—compared to whom even the accursed Boniface VIII of Dante appears a venial sinner—and by the armies of France, Cesare Borgia, after having renounced his blood-red cardinal's hat, conquered many cities and castles in Central Italy. Then, after the sudden death of his holy father, he suddenly collapsed: to live on in the frightened memory of posterity as the flash of a cataclysmic meteor, an image of the Antichrist.

Therefore he was very dear to Machiavelli, because of his total impiety. Indeed, it was the apex of Anti-Dantism, of anti-medievalism, of realistic political science, to side with the Satanic son of a godless pontiff!

Cesare Borgia vanished in 1507. Machiavelli began writing *The Prince* six years later. There had been plenty of time to understand the reasons and nature of the Borgia's failure. It was absolutely clear that no universal idea and no national plan had inspired the conqueror's soul; selfishness and lust for pleasure and power had been his only inspirations; the examples of the Italian tyrants of the Renaissance, often ungodly but often at least intellectually adequate, like works of art, had been translated by him into the uncontrolled style of Spanish imagination. When compared to the fanatic of the Dantean era, Cola di Rienzo, Cesare Borgia not only remains far below the level of Cola's morality, to whom no fair judge would dispute the praise of generous naïveté; but even as a politician the Borgia is more of a dwarf and hunchback than the unlucky Roman tribune. It had been absurd to dream of a novel Roman unity of the world founded on the Roman populace of the late Middle Ages and on the authority of an amateur Latinist and scribe; but it was simply preposterous to plan the establishment of an Italian monarchy founded on a kind of hereditary Roman Papacy.

All that was perfectly clear, although not to Machiavelli. He did not surrender to failure and death; he did not relent in his passionate fondness for the idol of his fantasy. It is in some way moving to read in *The Prince* that Cesare Borgia had nearly completed everything that was required to ensure the permanence of his power and fortune, when unexpected bad luck struck him. His father died, too early; and he himself was taken severely ill. "He told me afterwards," so the historian confides to us, "that he had thought of everything that might happen if his father came to die, and that he had found a remedy for everything, except that he never thought of the possibility that, while his father was dying, he too might be near death." No sign of metaphysical irony or of the kind of humble awe which would have stirred a Shakespeare accompanies this astonishing report. Not for a single moment is Machiavelli's mind perturbed by the doubt whether the "unexpected bad luck" was not rather the epiphany of an immanent justice, the revenge of real Reality against the politician who, most unrealistically, fancied that cunning and violence are the only requirements of political and military action, the punishment inflicted by What-Must-Be on the Might-Have-Beens, by Life on the robots. There is the popular story of the peasant who said that his donkey, after having learnt to live without any food, unfortunately and unexpectedly died. Such is, approximately, Machiavelli's attitude toward Cesare Borgia's luck and end. Then he goes on, devoutly bowing to his goddess "Virtue"—his Cæsar's "ferociousness and virtue"—and to another goddess, Fortune: a superstitious nickname given by him to the unknown power which other people used to call God. But still another time, a few pages later, he insists, with a pathos not deprived of an involuntarily comic effect: "I never shall refrain from alleging, as examples worthy of imitation, Cesare Borgia and his deeds."

Now, however, that the Borgia was dust and nil, Machiavelli had to look elsewhere, for somebody else in whose flesh and blood the spirit of the Prince might be incarnated.



Why not himself, Machiavelli the Prince? He did not dare. Dejectedly, already in the mood of an underling, he recognized himself to be of the "popular" class, a man fit to understand the princes, not to fill their role.

He turned his eye to Florence, his native city, and to the Medicean family. The book was inscribed to the "Magnifico Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici": a hopeless underling. Why should not a Florentine prince—that Magnifico underling—rise to be the prince and king of his dreams, the unifier of Italy and chaster of the barbarians who had sullied her soil?

This too was a peak of Anti-Dantean speculation. Dante had wanted the unity of the world against the will of Florence; Machiavelli, the realist, prophesied the unity of Italy around the will of Florence. But the prophecy of neither was acknowledged by history.

The Roman Emperor had been buried. The Prince of the Renaissance did not even need a burial: he, whose very birth was absurdity.

But some kind of reward was due to Machiavelli's heroic soul, to this Pygmalion-like spirit who could not breathe any kind of life, either artistic or historic, into the unfinished statue of his Titan. The leniency of his fate allowed him to die three years before the final collapse of Florence, which seemed to be the collapse of Italian civilization.

He had sung the great Psalm of violence and treachery. The fervour of his patriotic and Plutarchian creed, together with the pessimism inspired in him by the catastrophe, can explain the blunder; they do not excuse it.

That Psalm would have sounded better if the conquerors of Italy had sung it. It is distressing to hear the lamb bleating a hymn for perfidy and cruelty in the very teeth of the wolf.

## *Intermission*

“**T**HE graves are fitter to take the living than give up the dead.” These few words express the whole destiny of the Italian Renaissance. Because the élite of the intelligent and the leading class chose to look backward, they missed, and caused the Italian people to miss, the opportunities of the present. The ancient fable of Orpheus taught the same lesson: the poet who turned his head to look after his spouse, or the memory of the past, which was silently following him, forfeited both her resurrection and his own life.

Too many explanations were given of the Italian catastrophe; but only this one is conclusive, and it includes in its implications whatever may be fragmentarily true in the others. The Christians, in the wake of Fra Girolamo Savonarola, supposed that Italy was punished for her profanity and worldliness, nay, for her sensuous masterpieces in poetry and the arts (as if the French and Spanish warriors were saints). The Pagans, among them Machiavelli, on the contrary accused the Catholic priests of having made the Italians “godless and wicked”; and they were convinced that the Italians were punished not for having violated the commandments of Christ and the Church, but for not having heeded the one commandment that came from classical patriotism and heroism: the voice that spoke from the graves.

They certainly did not fight much, on the whole, for the liberty of Italy. This happened, however, not out of the alleged Italian cowardice: a charge of which no serious social test can give evidence at any time. It happened because there was no Italy and no liberty for which to fight. To be killed, worse yet, to kill the

enemy, is unthinkable unless the fighter is inspired by love, hatred, passion of some sort. The criticism of Machiavelli, raging against the mercenary troops, would have proved at least equally valid against a national standing army had it ever been possible during the Italian Renaissance to substantiate such a paradox: a national army without a nation.

The peasant, the tradesman, the sailor, cared for his acre of land, his shop, his ship. The nation was too broad an idea for them; as it ever was, until very recent times, for all the popular classes anywhere. The *élite*, the chosen few, had a fatherland of their own; but with single exceptions that fatherland was not Italy. The idea of the nation was too narrow for them; their fatherland was the glory of their Fathers, the universe of the ancient and universal civilization and beauty. Between the boundless immensity of this conception and the fractured reality of the daily life lay Italy, less than a scheme, not even a compromise. Who was to fight for her? Who was to lead the fighters?

Later on the Protestant historians and those among the Italians who followed their suggestion supposed that the ruin of Italy lay in her religious conservatism. Had she adopted the Protestant reformation she would have lived. But Germany, the majority of which had adopted Protestantism, did not fare much better than Italy for at least two centuries. Moreover, there was no reason why the Italian peasant, the tradesman, the sailor, and their wives should abandon Catholicism, with its luxuriant mythology expressed in lovely marble and colours and with its offer of forgiveness and hope, to join what would have been to them a gloomy sectarianism, with its barren temples and its despair in the face of God. As for the *élite*, it had actually abandoned the Catholic faith; but to its philosophical beliefs or to its radical scepticism the theological disputes of the Northern confessions were inadequate, and tinged somehow with medievalism and barbarism. They did not keep aloof from Protestantism because Protestantism was above their mind, but because their mind was larger than it. If they had deserted the great Church, they had

not done so in order to creep some day into the narrowness of the sects.

To be sure, as an intellectual error of the leading class was at the root of the Italian catastrophe, so was a moral and religious error at the root of the intellectual error. Selfishness, vanity, is the name of the sin. It was the claim to the matchless nobility of the Roman blood and the endless mission of world-command entrusted to its descendants. There is no use trying to embellish this sin and to crown it with the halo of disinterested passion. It was, more than anything else, the lust for personal superiority, founded on the feeling of a superior collective inheritance, the multiplication of one's self by the prestige of the foregoing generations. There, more than anywhere else, lies the seed of Nationalism and Racialism; poets and literati, particularly sensitive to the stimuli of ambition and vanity, were often responsible for the fertility of that poisonous seed; and what happened in Italy during the Pre-Renaissance and the Renaissance belongs, for the greatest part, to that kind of psychological happening. Had the men of the intellectual élite been able to feel humane and modest, in a spirit of brotherhood, toward present and past, toward Romans and so-called barbarians, they would also have been able to build an upper class leading their people to a desirable future. They did not care at all for their people; they kept staring, in a kind of lofty idiocy, at columns, arches, porches, and the statues of some bull-faced and fat-breasted world-emperors of yore; (absent-minded shepherds,) they hardly noticed that the herd of their nation was dashing into the abyss.

It was an abyss. If the intellectual élite had so chosen in the period between Dante and Machiavelli, an alternative course might have lain open to Italian history: a confederacy of the northern and central principalities and cities, a defensive alliance with the South, a common front against the lust for prey threatening from Spanish and Transalpine militarism, a preservation of the hereditary values of universal civilization embodied in a

modern social life. Now it was too late. Expiation and humiliation were inescapable.

The tragedy of the Italian nation can be compared to none other, save the dispersion and servitude of Israel. The gravestone fell, slowly suffocating, upon the land that had wanted to be the land of Renaissance, of Resurrection. Political unity in a united territory is not strictly necessary to the life of a people; the lack of independence is deadly. As the feeling becomes customary that such a people is not allowed to exercise self-rule, that strangers must give it law and order, a feeling of unworthiness and shame crystallizes in the masses and the individuals. The power of initiative is crippled; courage and honour, in individual behaviour, are gradually stifled and mortified. The Italians who, nostalgic over their unforgettable primacy over the barbarians, had cursed and despised the Republics of the Middle Ages, too small for their ambitions, now were thralls of the barbarians. It had been a delirium of inferiority; it was now really an inferiority, an actual one.

In such circumstances even economic competition slackens; all impulses to joy and creation slow down. Poverty and carelessness are sublimated to the point of moral virtues; a blind resignation is the presage of a supernatural reward.

The populace, and a part of the upper class, had their religion, Catholicism. The habits of the Roman court had been purified, and popes like Boniface VIII and Alexander VI were now impossible. On the other hand, the dogma had been and was steadily being stiffened and multiplied, an intolerable challenge to the dignity of human intelligence. Christian mythology, a beautiful compact work of art, in whose creation the Italian genius had had a pre-eminent share, swelled to the crushing magnificence of the baroque form, with multitudes of jumping martyrs and trumpeting angels. Morals, now thoroughly legalistic, consisted of a pyramidal heap of commands and prohibitions, mitigated by the laxity of the periodical absolutions, by means of which the priest

and confessor untiringly moulded the weak clay of his sheep's souls.

There was also, beside and within the religion, the family. Not having a national society, and being the subjects either of a foreign power or of a fragmentary state vassal to foreign powers, the Italians shrank to a minimal and elementary society, the first cell of human organization—namely, the family—where spirits otherwise thwarted by the disintegration of the society at large felt comparatively self-sufficient and at ease. It was no moral achievement, no sentimental masterpiece, as often supposed; although real love and the will to sacrifice and humble heroism were active in many cases within the walls of the home, in many other cases a superficial varnish of tender hue masked a prison; and in too many cases the Italian family was essentially different from the ideal home, as represented by English novelists and poets, in the subtle counterpoint which linked its inward life to the outward world. Because they had nothing better the Italians learned to love exclusively the family, and they gave to it in their imagination a place which it had by no means held during the creative periods of Italian literature and arts, when Dante and Petrarch had bestowed their hearts on women they had not wed, and when children and pets had only rarely been the protagonists of tales and paintings. Even the Christian mythology of the Italians shifted more and more from Christ to the Virgin, more and more the religion of a feminine deity; Christ himself from the Cross to the manger, and the Virgin herself from glory among the stars to the bed of her parturition and the arm-chair where she sat eternally nursing an eternal baby. The accent was on motherhood; and the Holy Family, with a rather superfluous husband, a saintly granny, and John the little friend of the curly-headed little boy Jesus, became to the Italians Olympus and Paradise, earthly happiness and celestial beatitude, the symbol of the myriads of infinitesimal republics or principalities into which their society had disintegrated.

Rather than republics these families were principalities, al-

though of a strange sort. The husband and father should have been the prince; he was also the breadwinner; he did not shirk from toil and worry in order to make a living, more for his dear ones than for himself. His morals, in some way quite innocent, were the morals of the nest. If the difficulty of keeping body and soul together, the appeal of temptation, together with the defective working of some of his will-brakes, misled him into some kind of social transgression, the law and courts might condemn him, but the Church was benevolent and society at large would utter words of heartfelt compassion for the unlucky one. Since the ultimate aim and standard of social life was the family, whatever was sinned for the family's sake was, ultimately, no sin. The husband and father, bearing all the burden of economic obligations and responsibility before the law, felt consequently entitled to exercise a despotic power within the family. There he was a prince; he browbeat the wife into menial labour and into compulsory fidelity; the marital murder, should she fail to observe her pledged chastity, far from being a crime, was a social institution to which even the judges, if not the written law, bowed. He also tyrannized over the children, whom he fondly loved, "for their good." But the tyranny which he openly exercised with his force, in the shape of a pygmy Machiavellian lion, was mysteriously balanced by the tyranny of the wife, in the shape of the Machiavellian fox; the latter was of a more permanent and insistent sort, at length, usually, the victorious one. Other forces, visible and occult, complicated the interplay of reciprocal tyrannies, of which the inner texture of an average Italian family consisted. The children, as long as possible, unblushingly exploited the father; he in his turn, when he deemed that the time had come, willingly collapsed and accepted the bread of his children. It was misfortune, and nearly disgrace, if a boy wandered off to live by himself; the girls married, or were buried alive, no matter whether with or without religious calling, in a nunnery (where they cooked pastry); or they became servants in the household of married brothers. Often grandparents, in-laws, bachelors, spin-

sters, joined under the same roof the nucleus of the holy family; they took their meals together, fifteen or twenty persons at the same table; the food would be savoury, heavy, inducive of drowsiness and corpulency. This was the system called, with high praise, patriarchal; indeed, it was retrograde and primitive. It could not lack a sort of slavery, a bland one. The servants or the single maid belonged to the family; physical violence, to teach them a lesson, was not exceptional; the freedom of their personality was nothing, their wages derisible; as a recompense they were allowed and even prompted to mingle in the business and passions of the family; the difference of classes was obliterated in a confused intimacy.

This picture, a gloomy one, does not take duly into account whatever sweetness, purity, generosity, might sublimate the organism of the Italian family in the age of decadence. It bears, however, a resemblance to that organism at its worst, which was not its rarest, and of the socially disruptive forces which gnawed at it. What Balzac related about family life in provincial France, or what we read in Hebbel about the German petty bourgeoisie, is not much better; neither is what we are told in America about Babbitt's home very elating. The Italians, however, had little or no escape in other activities, not in politics or war or daring business or sports; the surplus of energy was ordinarily spent by women (in gossip and prayer,) by means of which they were later commissioned as intermediaries between their husbands' religious negligence and God's mercy, while the same amount or more was spent by the males in the sport of vagabond love or in the longing for it. Adultery, even on the part of the wife if she succeeded in keeping it secret from the family, was at any rate better than separation and open disorder, let alone divorce, which was and still is legally impossible; licentiousness, and even prostitution, when absolved by the confessor, did not block the road to Paradise; the wilful and open infringement of the sacrament of matrimony found no pardon. An unparalleled record of that society was finally given by Stendhal, especially in *La Chartreuse*



*de Parme*, with all the ferments of those repressions and all the sighs of those vain revolts. He loved even that kind of Italy, in whose decay he felt the almost everlasting presence of an uncurbed energy waiting for some new kind of expression. Now and again an exceptionally powerful personality rose single-handed from the slush; in other countries it would have grown to social service and harmonic greatness; there, where it lacked the support of a natural and national society, it often grew rank, as primitively anarchical as the nucleus of the family was primitively isolated. Born heroes would turn into Titanic criminals. Casanova and Buonaparte, the conquerors of women and men, came from the same stock.

Such were the riches of Italy: her common religion—and, beside it, the motley picturesqueness of the popular superstitions—the sanctuary of the family, and, at the bottom of her heart, a repressed but never suppressed hatred of mediocrity and love for majesty and grandeur.

She also had beauty in nature: her sky, which is so lovely when it is lovely—as one of her writers stated with submissive melancholy.

And more than anything else, she had beauty in art, an æsthetic mission in the modern world.

It was easy for foreigners to acknowledge it. It was as if Italy, as a nation, had immolated herself on the altar of beauty. Her primacy in that field of human service was almost unanimously accepted.

There is no Italian race; neither is there any God-given primacy in any field. But the circumstances in which the Italian people had grown, particularly between the Alps and Tuscany, and the suggestions which it had received from inheritance and education, had made of it an imaginative and creative community, with a fullness of results to which only those of ancient Greece can be compared.

The wreath of artistic glory, however, and the gratitude of the outsiders for the æsthetic mission of Italy, could hardly satisfy

the starving Italian soul. Nothing, not even art, is a substitute for social life.

Neither could it be expected that while the roots of life were rotting the branches might keep on flourishing in the beauty of art.

Slowly, one branch withered after the other. Poetry, of all arts the most closely connected with freedom of expression and thought, was the first to decline. There was no Italian poet of really European influence after the end of the sixteenth century and Tasso. The plastic arts lingered two centuries longer. Music, the emotional breath of the nation, seemed imperishable.

The intermission lasted about three centuries.

## *Risorgimento*

THE name chosen for the new era, *Risorgimento*, was bad: another variant of Renaissance, another plea for a resurrection of the dead.

The author of a popular anthem wanted the graves opened and the heroes and martyrs of former ages reawakened. Another one saw on Italy's head the helm of Scipio, of the Roman warrior who vanquished Carthage, the protagonist of Petrarch's Latin epic.

But such references to the past were, comparatively, subordinate. On the whole, while the name of the *Risorgimento* was objectionable, the thing itself was good, and new.

Italy in the nineteenth century became a modern nation, with body and soul, with a united territory and a common law.

In the background of the overturn were a new science and philosophy, nay, a new religion, in which Italians had their share. It was the Humanism of the eighteenth century; a classicism without idolatry, a Christianity without mythology, the highest mark reached so far by the human mind. A new discipline, economics, tried to embody in rules of practical and cohesive action the teachings of both charity and happiness. Nature, a benevolent and purposive one, took the place of the vengeful Gods; the earthly Paradise and the glory of perfection were set as the ultimate ends of human progress and removed from the past of an impotent desire. The English revolutions, and in their wake the American and French, seemed to have dealt a deadly blow to all kinds of Machiavellism. Not that all men and statesmen became lambs and angels, but the theory of lion- and fox-like politics was almost universally dismissed; it was assumed that what was good or evil for the individual was equally good or evil for society, and that individual man and responsible statesman must strive toward the same ethics and religion.

As an autonomous event, the Italian Risorgimento matured under the influence of an eight-star constellation: five poets and three heroes. The poets were Alfieri, Parini, Foscolo, Manzoni, Leopardi. The heroes were Mazzini, Garibaldi, Cavour.

Not all of these poets won a world-wide celebrity. They were not inferior to the masters of the German and Western literatures; neither, indeed, were they minor in comparison to such writers as Lermontov, Pushkin, and Gogol. But these last three were driven forward to world reputation by the impact given later to all of Russian literature by writers as irresistibly and universally popular as Dostoevsky and Tolstoi, to whose direct and boundless appeal nothing can be compared in the later Italian novels of this age. As for the European Romanticists, they were kept aloft, even when they spoke a difficult and aristocratic language, by the intellectual fortune and the political power of their countries, whereas the Italians still suffered from the eclipse of Italian literature which had lasted over two centuries, an obstacle

also to the diffusion of Italian as a common language of the European intelligentsia. Besides, the Italian poets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lived amidst the throes of an Italian birth or rebirth; this was all important to them, but less so to foreign readers; the supremely national pathos of their poems and prose made them less assimilable to the world at large.

Foscolo, Byron-like in some features of his career but Shelley-like in the glow of his poetic eloquence, the son of a Venetian father and a Greek mother, was the most classicist of all, the most deeply attached to the Roman-Greek ideal and to the dream of the past. But it was flesh and blood for him, not paper and ink, as it had been for most of the *litterati* from Petrarch downward. After a short spring of hope in which he had honestly fancied that Napoleon Buonaparte would establish the freedom and unity of Italy, his disappointment brought him back to the old paths. He wandered among graves, thinking and singing that only beauty and glory make life worth living and death worth dying, that history is meaningless in its supposed purposes, and the only permanent result of the Trojan war, as of any other human struggle, is in the pity and terror with which a poet, a Homer, may contemplate it. Hence his inclination to a static pessimism, or to a kind of desperate patriotism inspired to some extent by an aftermath of Machiavellism. But he could not settle down in a cynical or literary quietude. Life, which is hope—even against hope—and will, took hold of him. When the Austrian armies came back to Italy, he resolved, after troublesome hesitations, to flee from servitude and shame. He migrated to Switzerland and England, where he died, introducing again into Italian literature the sorry glory of exile, now an Italian political institution, as characteristic of the Italian individual mind as mass exodus is of Israel.

Alfieri, a Piedmontese nobleman, became the connecting link between his little country and his greater fatherland, Italy. A principality, ruled by the dynasty of Savoy, had grown, by slowly

but stubbornly aggrandizing itself, at the north-western corner of the peninsula. It had had its origin on the French side of the Alps; but there, as well as on the shore of the lake of Geneva, its progress was easily balked; the counts of Savoy, afterwards dukes of Savoy and kings of Sardinia, having secured a firm foothold on the eastern slope of the Alps, found their lust for power more and more whetted by the Po valley and the Tyrrhenian sea; they coveted Genoa and Milan. The state—a hybrid—partly French in territory and popular language, and for long centuries more French than Italian in social habits and in whatever culture it had, had developed along a line of its own far more similar to the type of the European military monarchies than to that of the Italian republics and principalities. Machiavelli would have been astonished at the thought that the Italian prince might ever rise in that half-foreign state and have his cradle in Turin instead of Florence or Romagna. But Count Alfieri, born in Asti near Turin, loathed the city and court where “all served the One”; he despised that One, the not very enlightened despot; he also chose exile, a voluntary and fairly whimsical one, running all over Europe and finally settling in Florence, where, entirely detached from the social and political obligations of the present, he definitively imbued himself with the permanent literary spirit of Italy and with the problem of the Italian political destiny, past and future. He wrote tragedies in good number, flaming with freedom and tyrannicide; and the Rome of which his imagination was full was not the metropolis of the Cæsars but the motherland of civil liberties. His restlessness was less inconclusive than Foscolo’s; his pessimism was never severed from a constructive intention. The French revolution, no differently from what it did to Goethe, at first exalted him; then he hated the vulgarity of its mobs and the horror of its slaughters. The American revolution—started also, as he supposed, rather from an economic struggle than from an ideal conflict, and ending in a compromise—had disappointed him after a first burst of confident enthusiasm.

In the main, his preferences steered toward a mixed system of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, somewhat resembling the British constitution.

Parini, a modest Lombard teacher, was, in the substance of his principles as well as in the clarity and chasteness of their poetic expression, the purest Italian representative of the eighteenth-century ideal of humanity, which he tried to reconcile with a Catholicism whose accent was far more on morality and charity than on dogma and mythology. No ancient Romanism, no Pantheon and graveyard-heroism were sheltered in his mind, which was in perfect agreement with his perfect heart.

Manzoni, in the wake of Parini, soon discarded whatever might seem insolent and conceited in the rationalism of the eighteenth century, but he always retained its spirit of tolerance and human hope. He was the most complete Italian mind of the new age, hence the idol of many Italians who exaggeratedly matched him with Dante. His personality was less mighty; he was, however, the first and only one who, far from joining as an equal or an emulator the personality of Dante, systematically opposed many of its most powerful implications. He did this in his modest and cautious way; he carefully avoided, whenever he could, even mentioning Dante; and he would have felt ashamed of posing as his antagonist. But, quite consciously, he rejected any kind of Titanism or Plutarchian heroism; he also quietly discarded the Dantean theory and practice of an aristocratic and lofty poetic language, endowing his rising nation with the most valuable of his gifts: a plain, clear language, apt to prose, science, and colloquial usage.

If some features of Dantism, especially the arbitrariness of its ambition, were alien to him, Machiavellism and its "reason of state," despite all extenuating circumstances, must have been blasphemies. The individual soul was sacred to him in the sacredness of the human communion. Practically the last of his works was a tiny book entitled *History of the Infamous Column*, the passionate report of a trial held in Milan during a pestilence

of the seventeenth century, when a few poor wretches were tortured into confessing that they had, by means of some ointments, spread the black plague, and were thereupon legally murdered. More than an episode of local history, the booklet was the intentional indictment of all idolatry of the State, a judgment carried with awed soul against all terrestrial judges acting after the example of that one who, before the crucifixion of Jesus, stated that right it is that one should die for the people.

The dimension of Manzoni's work is not large. He wrote two tragedies, a few lyric poems, and a masterly historical novel. History, contemplated even more with pity than with terror, appears throughout his subject matter. In one of his short poems, written in a blaze immediately after the death of Napoleon, he laid the pall of Christian compassion on the fallen Titan's hearse; there were, however, some remains of worldly admiration for the greatness of Napoleon's personality: he later repented them. Great men, Titans, so-called geniuses, were to him the enemies of God and persecutors of mankind.

He was, or became, a Catholic. But, although irreproachably orthodox, he did not exceedingly care for mythology and dogma. The accent of his religion was far more on the Christian than on the Catholic element; and, again, that accent was far more on the Catholic, that is, universal, than on the Roman element of Catholicism. Charity and piety were foremost to him. His conformism was dictated rather by humility and piety than by the fervour of a zealot. It was a hard task to separate the permanent values of Christianity from the superstitions and the political meanness of the Roman Church; neither could the humble Manzoni succeed single-handed in a task which would have proved too heavy even for a collective religious revolution. He succeeded somehow in the secrecy of his subtly balanced conscience. A tinge of Protestant rationalism and lay humanism was never deleted from his mind.

As an Italian patriot, he wanted the independence and unity of his country, no matter at first whether the unity should or should

not be attained through a strict political link joining all the regions from the Alps to Sicily. The accent was rather more on independence than on unity. He diffidently avoided far-flung political schemes, and, having easily dismissed from his mind the hereditary complex of the Roman world-empire, did not undertake as his task the constitution of the modern world-federation; but the inclination of his thought was toward both the union of all Italian peoples within Italy and the collaboration of all the nations in the world. His political tenets are so simple and pure as to sound obvious; an aversion to politics as an art detached from ethics and aiming at the conquest of power is their common background. "God condemns the force of the conqueror; all nations must be free; the iniquitous right of the sword must perish." Not only the vanquished have their troubles; there is a Nemesis for the winners; there is even a purification in belonging, as the Italians did, among the oppressed. They do not feel hatred against their oppressors; as soon as these have crossed the borders they will be our brothers again.

Leopardi was the poet and thinker who most comprehensively included both extremes of the Italian political longing in his short and unfortunate career. He started as a thoroughbred classicist. Beauty, perfection, and glory were in the past only. He identified his personal misfortune with the disaster of Rome and ancient Italy; he echoed the usual complaint about the downfall of the mistress of the world. Although physically crippled he dreamed of fights and bloody laurels: "An armour to me; I shall fight alone, alone I shall die"; his imaginary fight and death were a sacrifice to that Italian Moloch, the classical phantom. No religious belief like Manzoni's soothed his despair; Nature alone could have been holy to him; and Nature too, after the primitive Golden Age of innocent freedom and love in which he wanted to believe, had become a stepmother to mankind. Then, shortly before his end, he had a reversal. He did not go back to Mother Church; neither did he relent in his accusations against history and life. But he came to the conclusion that, since Nature and its



untamable forces were the real enemy of man, all men should unite in a common purpose of defence. The centre of Leopardi's thought is abruptly shifted from the irrevocable past to a reasonable future. The idea of a peaceful and progressive world-federation, far beyond any particular Italian patriotism and now totally disentangled from the Roman complex, visibly looms over the last and vastest of his poems.

It seems possible that Leopardi, at this last moment, directly or indirectly underwent the influence of young Mazzini.

All the five poets of the Risorgimento were Northerners with the sole exception of Leopardi, a Central Italian, born in a town of the Papal States not very far from their northern border. All the three heroes were citizens of the Savoy monarchy—Mazzini and Garibaldi both Ligurians, Cavour a Piedmontese. This geographic distribution, in which the South was not represented by any leading figure, was to have its effect on the future.

The ideas and the deeds of the three men of action are well known to the world. There would have been no Wilson, there would be no League of Nations, without the precedent of Mazzini. He was the connecting link between the writers and the fighters, between the Italian literary ideal and the fact of the Risorgimento, as well as between past and future, nation and humanity.

A writer himself, he seldom exceeded, if judged from the standpoint of artistic excellence, the limits of mediocrity; his prose is laden with overemphasis and hammering repetitions. The echoing of such formulas as "God and the people" is obsessive, the lack of humour and grace is total.)

As a man of action he can rightly be considered as a failure by those whose standard lies in the proportion between the effort and the actual result. What he wanted did not materialize. There seems, besides, to be a gap, or even an offending contradiction, between his theory of intransigent truth and religious fervour and his practice of conspiracies and plots.

Romanticism, the most extreme, is stamped on his physical ap-

pearance: the towering bare forehead, the fixed looks, the pale, ascetic complexion, the slender consumed body constantly dressed in a black velvet suit and in a large and equally black cravat. He also played the guitar and sang thereto.

All the features of his personality and intellect, even the unlikeable ones, are sublimated in the never-relaxing earnestness of his purpose, in the sacerdotal austerity of his conviction. His character was that of a high priest and prophet. Exile, the Italian institution, became to him, after a short apprenticeship in the Piedmontese prisons, the subjective fate even more than the objective fatality of his life. When at last, old and weary, he was allowed to return to Italy—now united and independent, although under a monarchical rule of which he disapproved—he nevertheless had to live and die, almost hidden, under an assumed name. His death, although in his fatherland, was that of a refugee.

He had not the destiny of a Washington or a Masaryk; he was not the father and president of his fancied and divinely inspired Italian republic. But if one disregards the monarchical or republican form, his share in the actual issues of the Italian Risorgimento was comparable to none. Freedom and independence from foreign and domestic tyrants had been the hopes of a century-long literary tradition; unity, strict political unity from the Alps to the islands, with the capital in Rome, such was the conquest of Mazzini. This principle, asserted by him with the stubbornness of a monomaniac propaganda, passed irresistibly into the minds of the successful statesmen who made Italy.

It may be doubted whether or not the strict political unity and the establishment of the capital in Rome were wise for the new nation. Had Mazzini been only the originator of such items in the national programme, he would be known as a local prophet, subject to the variance of local judgments. His meaning is much wider, a universal one.

Supreme brilliancy and all-embracing readiness of mind are not always the marks of real genius. Sometimes a genius is just one fixed idea, even if apparently absurd, in an obdurate will.

Such was Columbus, the Ligurian; and this other Ligurian—Mazzini—too.

He was a discoverer of unities, an explorer of deep waters between faraway continents. He built a bridge, a seemingly absurd one, between the ancient and the new civilizations, as well as between medieval theology and modern humanism. The bridge was so narrow and daring as to seem impracticable, but it has proven safe; probably the only one now safe for this humanity of ours to tread.

He certainly was an Italian man of letters, nourished like all the others upon the reminiscences and regrets of the past glory of Rome. He was also a worshipper of Dante, in whom he found the idea of the unity of mankind and of human society as a revelation of God. He accepted the double inheritance, yet not without reservations and changes. He resumed, from the ancient Romanism, the purpose of universal law and unitary organization; he dismissed the right of the sword. He agreed with the Middle Ages as far as the goal of human history was concerned; no differently from Dante he saw that goal in the perfectibility of human intellect and action, and in the realization of God's plan, but he freed his religion from the structure of Catholic dogma and mythology.

No doubt some traces of superstition were still visible in his system. Particularly are two of them noteworthy, one in religion and the other in politics. In religion he was unable to abandon the idea of the static God, who is at the beginning and at the end of the world, and whose intention the human mind merely reflects and actuates. Had he succeeded in founding a new religion and in becoming its chief, this static idea of God would unavoidably have led him to some new kind of suffocating dogmatism. He could not reach the conception of mankind striving together with and, when need be, against the forces of nature, toward a dynamic idea of the divine, inspired from on high but originally creative, which is the real substance of history. The partially reactionary character of his religion accounts for the defectiveness

of his theory of freedom. He proclaims freedom most decidedly; yet one feels that he clings much more to the idea of dictated duty than to the idea of creative right. His failure spared him the trial of practical and legislative action among a mass of theoretically free citizens. It is only fair to surmise that, had he been the ruler of an Italian republic, watched by his personal and static God, his legislation would have been free only in the meaning that was given to freedom in a Spartan or in a Puritan commonwealth.

An analogous defect, due to the same origin, is noticeable in his economics, which are rather shallow. He opposed communism and socialism, now and then harshly, because the weight of their intention lay on the material, or, as he said, the materialistic side of life. He certainly was right, so far. It is superstitious to think that a shift or revolution in the economic order of the world might heal, by itself alone, the wounds and pains of human society. But it is no less superstitious to suppose that renovation and happiness, nay, social sanctity, might be possible without an economic plan. Mazzini had none.

In politics, especially in that part of his system which is concerned with the relations among nations, he stressed, indeed, that he loved his fatherland because he loved all fatherlands. Yet in spite of that he made too many, and too far-reaching, concessions to nationalism. He did not grow up to the hypothesis, which we deem to be the truth, that nations are historical and biological formations of a certain age, and that, as they had a beginning, so shall they have an end. He treated them as permanent essences, almost as Platonic ideas. Each of them is, according to him, entrusted with a "mission," also permanent and God-given. The boundaries, geographic and moral, of each are sacred. To mention some instances—which lack even the charm of profundity and novelty—he contended that the mission of England was in trade and colonies, while that of Russia was in the civilization of Asia. As for Italy, her mission was the most disinterested and the highest of all. She was, or was to be, a sacerdotal nation, in the likeness of Israel. Her task consisted of the spiritual uni-

fication of the world. Some day in the future a religion of love, virtue, and progress will have conquered all mankind. That day the political and religious structures of the states will be one and the same. The capital of Europe and of the planet will be Rome, where a great council of mankind shall sit and rule in harmonious collaboration with everybody in the world.

Mazzini's deism, nationalism, and Roman primacy can be put aside in a heap with his empty economics and with such literary and musical prophecies as those which claimed that the world literature to come should also find a capital and a starting point in Rome, and that the Italian opera, duly reformed in order to fit the Mazzinian purpose, should be the singing voice of the earth. These were, however, the scoriæ, not the core of his system. We do not mind the miscalculations of Columbus, or his queer ideas about the goal of his navigation; we keep in mind the inflexibility of his will and the reality of the shore on which he landed. Mazzini too, the supposed Utopist, landed on a real shore. All the glory of the political systems founded on the so-called soundness of realistic thinking is now dust and death, while the Mazzinian scheme becomes more and more, every day, the creative inspiration of the twentieth century. His purpose was a peaceful but ardent collaboration of all mankind toward human perfection, and a rational religion disentangled from all mythological superstition. This is also our purpose. He substitutes the Federation, or Republic, of Man—a possibility, nay, a necessity—for the Kingdom of God and the Roman Empire, two dreams, the latter of which was rather a nightmare. He forged a link between the freedom of the individual and the collectivity of human effort. Lastly, he discovered the continuity of human history, interpreting both Rome and Christianity as legitimate presages of the modern age, and thus conferring a prestige of tradition on whatever was revolutionary in his thought and will.

Leopardi had landed on that same shore, there to die. It had been visioned, more or less clearly, by the other poets. Garibaldi was the man who tried to translate the intellectual system into

open and consistent action. Although an offspring of the lower middle class, by trade a sailor, he had learned by heart Foscolo's classicist poems and knew very well about Leonidas defending with a handful of armed citizens the gates of free Greece against the host of the Persian Empire, and about Roman heroes sacrificing their lives to the republic. He did not care at all about Empire and Church. His God was the God of Mazzini, and so was his Italy. Even more sincerely than Mazzini he could have said of himself that he loved his fatherland because he loved all fatherlands. Wherever there was an opportunity to fight for liberty, he fought—not in conspiracies but in open battles. His talent for strategy, his genius for military adventure and guerrilla warfare, the incredible luck that rewarded his incredible audacity, shone in scores of exploits, from South America to Rome, from the Alps to Sicily, and finally even to Dijon during the Franco-Prussian war. He belonged to the race of the Italian condottieri and adventurers, a man of the Titanic stock; if his country had been free and powerful, able to raise for him armies like those which were raised for Napoleon by France and her vassals, he might have cherished the ambition of being the Napoleon of justice, the liberator of all nations and the founder of Mazzini's federation of the world. Such as he was, the circumstances in which he acted were largely inferior to the greatness of his hopes. There were also, in his private life, elements which his enemies were easily entitled to blame as disorderly; and his personal appearance as well as the staging of his enterprises bore some traits of operatic taste, although a childish imagination, and not the vanity of an actor, was their real cause. However, the following generations have confirmed in the main the judgments on Garibaldi of Victor Hugo and other leading spirits of Western Europe. He was the one who consistently lived, at the risk of his life, an international patriotism, and the hero—no matter how ridiculous the praise may sound to the wise—who wanted war, and really warred, only to make the world "safe for democracy and peace."

No conjecture about the alternative courses of the past is entirely absurd or entirely credible, since all such courses lack the verification of the accomplished facts. It seems, however, nearly absurd to suppose that Mazzini's conspiracies and Garibaldi's military coups could ever have fulfilled the hopes of the Italian poets. They both were disarmed, or scantily armed, prophets. It was just wishful thinking when Mazzini talked of raising an army of four million insurgents; the volunteers of Garibaldi were counted by thousands, or hundreds.

The direction was taken up by Piedmont, at any rate an actual state, however small, with a regular army and an adequate diplomacy. The man at the helm was a professional statesman, Cavour.

Many historians consider him as the greatest of all statesmen in modern times. One feature of this primacy, if there are such primacies, is in the extraordinary ratio between the means of which he disposed and the results which he attained. Bismarck, a few years later, built another national unity, Germany, but he had behind him a great military state, Prussia, not tiny Piedmont.

Cavour's results, in their turn, far exceeded his hopes. He had aimed at a kingdom of Northern Italy under the dynasty of Piedmont, and a confederation with other states of Italy, delivered from domestic and foreign servitude. But while he steered, so to speak, the engine of his boat toward that goal, it was as if the sails behind him took wind, filled with the inspiration that came from Mazzini and Garibaldi. They increased the speed and altered the direction, now bent for the strict political unity of all the peninsula and the two large islands. The helmsman noticed the change, but mastered the course. This sudden overturn, or peripety, gave to the culminating months of his career the supreme elegance of an artistic game.

Then death came, another seal of greatness; a struggling, almost sudden death, immediately after victory and immediately before the grey difficulties of the aftermath.

But foremost among his features of greatness is the funda-

mental purity of his heart and will, which finds no comparison in the modern political world, with the exception of some statesmen in American history. To be sure, he was no poet or prophet; he was, of the eight personalities in the constellation of the Risorgimento, the least nourished with classical or medieval tradition; he disliked, happily for him, any kind of political Romanism, and did not care very much for Rome itself; he even wrote French more easily than Italian. His religion, a liberal, too liberal, Catholicism, had no ties whatsoever with medieval hierocracy and universalism; neither could he ever have been able to scheme a mystical apotheosis of all mankind in the likeness of Mazzini's. His intellectual education, thoroughly modern, was that of a competent European economist, farmer, and diplomat, and he did not soar to Dantean altitudes. As a diplomatic technician he was fairly unprejudiced, and occasionally unscrupulous; wiles and even traps were not hateful to him, when possible and necessary to a purpose which he deemed legitimate. Most famous among his tricks, and at the same time the most necessary and the most unpleasant of all, was the intrigue by means of which he lured his enemy Austria into declaring a war which he and not Austria wanted; a superlative device that gained him the military help of France, otherwise denied. No doubt Machiavelli would have approved of that device, as he would have cheered the supple, snake-like expedencies by which Cavour entwined Garibaldi and made him subservient to his purpose. But Cavour was no Cesare Borgia; cynicism, however regrettable, was incidental to his method; not essential to his soul. He worshipped an ideal of selflessness and service, and power was to him a tool, not the substance of political action, which he by no means considered as ultimately distinct from ethics and religion. Mazzini and Garibaldi may have hated him, and he reciprocated their bitterness, but they all agreed in the love for Italy and in the hope for a free and righteous commonwealth of all nations. The three lights, seen from afar, shine in the same constellation.

Alfieri had been born in 1749, Cavour died in 1861. There was



already a united kingdom of Italy, stretching from the Alps to Sicily, although Venice and Rome still remained outside.

The phantom, after more than five centuries, had finally achieved a body.

## Query

THE political and religious ideals of the Risorgimento were not exclusively Italian. Those who do not read Italian poetry can find them in Hugo and Heine, in Shelley and Whitman. The system was a common patrimony of the nineteenth century.

But only in Italy were those ideals firmly connected with the traditions of the past, thereby holding out a promise of harmonious continuity. And the political outcome of the Risorgimento was unique. A nation arose, not as the natural issue of social struggle and economic determinism, but as the embodiment of spiritual principles.

The United States of America could claim to be the result of eighteenth-century philosophy. Italy, as a name and a phantom, had been the daughter of Dante; as an historical reality, she was the daughter of nineteenth-century philosophy and poetry.

She was the last born among the nations, the Benjamin of Europe. Yet she had a kind of primacy, the only desirable one. No other nation, not France, not England, could be compared to her so far as the voluntary and intellectual character of her foundations was concerned. She was born late, but on her birthday she was adult, a Pallas among the nations: with self-knowledge and purpose.

There was no reason for, and no possibility of, making of Italy the centre of the universe, as Mazzini's fond ambition had dreamed. But she might have been a beacon for all, a thing of beauty.

Why did it not happen?

Why was Italy so short-lived?

A course of about fifty years is less than what is ordinarily granted to the natural development of an individual life.

That nation, the Italy of the Risorgimento, did not exceed by much the duration of half a century.

In 1922 Fascism came.

## II

# Resurrection and Second Death



## *Little Italy*

VENICE came to Italy in 1866, Rome in 1870, five and nine years after the proclamation of the Kingdom and Cavour's death. Both acquisitions were the result rather of an intricate European situation and of diplomatic cleverness than of direct, victorious will.

To appreciate the effect of these events on the Italian mind one must go back to what had happened twenty years earlier.

In 1848 it had seemed that a free federation or unity of all Italy could be attained by the military and revolutionary forces of Italy alone. For a moment there had even been the hope that the Pope himself, Pius IX, might be one of the confederates and an enemy of Austria. The Catholic and the literary tradition, the Mazzinian conspiracy and the Garibaldian adventure, regular and irregular armies, Piedmontese ambition and popular uprisings—all the elements of the historic and the living nation were fused at a heat that promised a compact and spiritually self-sufficient unity. But the forty-eighters, who had improvised all over Europe an enthusiastic onrush on the future, were, sooner or later, defeated all over Europe: reaction and absolutism came back to France, Austro-Hungary, and Germany. The Italian revolution partook of the common destiny. The regular armies were driven back to Piedmont; Austria reinstalled her rule in Venice and Milan; the flames of the popular revolutions, after a few last flickerings, were stamped out everywhere.

The achievements of Cavour in 1859 and 1860 were the results of a sober mind in a sobered Piedmont and Italy. Indeed,

he succeeded in whatever he had planned and in more than that, but a price had to be paid. The original revolutionary spirit of the new nation had to be tamed into a compromise, and the military victory over Austria, with the ensuing deliverance of Lombardy and almost all of Italy, was made possible only by the help of France. But the weight of France's support was too heavy not to overshadow the prestige of Piedmont: whatever battles were fought, only a fraction of the common glory redounded to the Italian state. A malicious criticism could pretend that, indeed, the dynasty of Savoy had succeeded where Lodovico il Moro and Cesare Borgia during the Renaissance had failed, but that its success, no less than the failure of those Machiavellian princes, had been an episode of international politics, a by-product of the old French-Austrian strife for hegemony and continental balance, far more than the fruit of national will and valour. The history of the dynasty of Savoy was present to all minds: those mountain princelings who had become kings in Piedmont and Sardinia, and now, as the saying went, were eating up all Italy like an artichoke, leaf after leaf, had gone through a long record in which persistence and dexterity, and oftentimes even personal bravery, were more remarkable than chivalric spirit and spotless honour. To be sure, Machiavelli would have grinned at a pretence of loyalty and candour in a dynasty of rulers, and after all, the Savoyards had been 'better on the whole than the Machiavellian prince and many of their actual colleagues in Europe. However, the situation in which they had found themselves, a small power between the kingdom of France and the empire of Spain or Austria, had developed in their hereditary temperament the fox-like rather than the lion-like attitudes. It was hard to suppose that they now might have suddenly changed, investing themselves with the unfortunate but glorious ideal of the Italian poetical and mystic-political tradition. The surname that cheap courtiers added to the name of the first king of Italy, *il Re Galantuomo* (quite simply: the honest king), was in itself a questionable flattery, which implied the conviction that it is exceptional for a king and Savoyard

to be a decent fellow. Maybe his spirit, as well as that of his relatives, princes, dukes, and counts, still was very far from the Italian soul, and pettiness still dwelt with adroitness in that uncomely forehead under a costlier crown. Maybe the Italy of the Savoyard was just a larger Piedmont in his hand, and the game of this Italy between France and Austria was still the old game of the Savoyard between France and the Empire: the chess game, now played on a larger chessboard, in which he, the princeling, the pawn, had jumped forward from square to square, until he had safely reached the forerank, there to be promoted king.

What further promotion did he want now? and did he really care for Italy? or would it have been for him just the same had he been allowed to expand toward Provence and Switzerland instead of toward Lombardy and the southern seas? Many Mazzinians remained irreconcilable, and the Garibaldians were, at least, distrustful. Possibly Cavour would have had the driving power really to unite the dynasty and the nation; but he was one, and dead; and those who came after him were minor people. It is no use, anyhow, haloing Cavour with infallibility; mistakes were committed under his leadership also. To begin with, there was the problem of the numeral after the name of the king, Victor Emmanuel. One of his Piedmontese ancestors, truly an insignificant one, had borne that same name. Should he, the king of Italy, be Victor Emmanuel I, identifying his newness with the newness of the nation and doing away with the dusty continuity of the dynasty, or should he be Victor Emmanuel II, rendering the honour due to the family, and putting the family ahead of the nation? The former course had been adopted elsewhere, when James VI of Scotland became James I of Great Britain; the latter course was adopted in Italy. The difference was not trifling.

Another issue, more visibly substantial, was the territorial bargain with France. As a reward for her military intervention, France received from Piedmont the two territories of Savoy and Nice. Although Savoy had been the so-called cradle of the dynasty, it would be unfair, after the blame put on Victor Em-

manuel for having taken the dynastic numeral, to join those who charged him with having betrayed, under the suggestion of Cavour, the land of his ancestors. It was very good to betray the local past, and to let Savoy go where it linguistically and geographically belonged; namely, to France. It was one of the dogmas of the Italian tradition that Italy's border was the Alpine ridge and that the power of the Italian nation, a free and righteous one, should never go beyond that border. Savoy was beyond it. More intricate was the problem of Nice, and a pathetic circumstance complicated it further. Garibaldi having been born there, he resented the cession of his native city as a personal offence and treachery. This feeling led to an irreparable break between him and Cavour and to a tragic attack and defence in the Turin parliament. It was surmised that the violence of that moral struggle had its effect in the unexpected breakdown of Cavour's physical resistance and his early death. Apart from any detailed consideration, all the territorial trading between Piedmont and France lacked moral grandeur and political consistency; while Italy was created in behalf of the principles of popular liberty and self-determination, the peoples of two provinces were disposed of according to the old practice of dynastic sovereignty and cattle-selling.

More generally, the same sinful contradiction was visible in all the policy between Piedmont and France. True, the king of Piedmont, Vittorio Emanuele, was called *il Re Galantuomo*, the honest king, because he was supposed to have firmly resisted all the suggestions of Austria that he might betray the moderately liberal constitution of his state and restore absolute and reactionary rule. This supposition was a mere legend; but many believed it. On the other hand, was his ally and protector, Napoleon III, an *Imperatore Galantuomo*, an honest emperor? He had betrayed the ideals of his radical youth and subjected France to the tyranny of an individual and of a clique, both ambitious and weak, crushing and mediocre. Victor Hugo, the poet in exile, dubbed him *Napoléon le Petit*, Napoleon the Little, without even



greatness in crime. An ambiguous perfume of feminine voluptuousness and intrigue hovered over and about the Parisian imperial palace, and Cavour, misled by his conviction that the end, when pure, justifies the means, had not shrunk from using the charms of an Italian lady, the Contessa di Castiglione, half Venus, half Minerva, a patriotic courtesan, to lure the French ruler into the rapture of an adulterous romance and into the glory of the Italian campaign. Here again, Italy was to be created in the name of freedom and justice, while the French campaign in Italy was to serve Napoleon's purpose of increasing his personal prestige, thereby strengthening his hold on France and prolonging his tyranny. The dream of the Italian exiles was to come true, Dante and Foscolo were to feel content in their Emyrean, while their ideal victory, supporting the Napoleonic dictatorship in France, actually protracted the exile of Victor Hugo. Cavour died, but the moral contradictions of Italy's birth did not die with him.

The new-born nation had to face many serious problems, in economy and finance, in education and political structure. But for several years the problem of unity and the international policy connected with it overshadowed all the others. Venice with all its region was still under Austrian rule; Austria, the hereditary enemy, was still encamped in the Po valley, virtually menacing Northern and Central Italy. Rome and Latium still belonged to the Pope.

When Prussia, in 1866, declared war on Austria, Italy eagerly joined her. As Cavour had been the ally of Napoleon III, so were his successors the allies of Bismarck: another, and even more unnatural, tie. Another round of the old diplomatic and military game began.

It was not played very skilfully by the new-born nation. While Bismarck won a smashing victory over Austria at Königgrätz, the Italians fought two indecisive battles, one on the field of Custoza and another on the waters of Lissa. There was no Italian victory over Austria—except for the usual, but this time ineffective, Garibaldian skirmishes—nor was there an Austrian victory over Italy.

But now the old complexes of superiority and inferiority were allowed to work freely. Italy went out of the war with a wailing consciousness of defeat, and, which was worse, with an awed admiration for Prussianism and Bismarckism.

The dismay was increased, if possible, by the diplomatic issue of the war. Austria did not want to humiliate her pride by giving up Venice to Italy; she ceded the city and the region to a neutral friend, Napoleon III, who in turn handed them over to his creature, to Italy, as to a vassal and protégé. It was to the sensitive and wounded imagination of the Italians as if the mighty of the earth, Bismarck, Napoleon, and the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef, had dropped from their banquet in Olympus a gift of charity, and even of contempt, to Italy, feeding her body and mortifying her soul.

Another round of the old game solved, so to speak, the Roman question.

Some thinkers of the Risorgimento had cherished a federalistic plan, which in their mind was more congruous with the historic lines of the development of Italy, and which also offered an opportunity of avoiding the dangerous Roman issue. Some thinkers and statesmen, especially Piedmontese, had not concealed their dislike of Rome, both as an idol of the past and a prospective capital of the new nation. They were easily overwhelmed by the feelings of the intellectual majority. The Roman complex dominated the Italian mind, and Rome was with yearning proclaimed the capital of Italy, as early as 1861.

That the coveted fruit remained for about a decade far from the Italian hand was the effect of the opposition of France. Garibaldi tried to act single-handed. In 1862, at the head of a few red-shirted volunteers, he started a march on Rome. He was met by the Italian regular army, wounded, and taken prisoner. Five years later he tried again. This time, in 1867, he was met by French troops, in the Roman Campagna, and routed. His idealistic glory remained untainted, but his military prestige suffered from the evidence that his guerrilla warfare was of little, if any,

avail against trained modern armies. The blood, however, that he and his young heroes had shed made the Roman complex of the Italian intelligentsia more sacrosanct than ever.

Then came the Franco-Prussian war, in 1870. Two courses were open to Italy, one of which seemed to some of her statesmen, and even to the king, the course of honour and duty: to side with France and bring her the support of the Italian armies against the invaders, reinstating between the two nations an equality of brotherhood and service and checking a newly arising German peril in the midst of Europe. The other counsel was one of wisdom and prudence: to keep neutral, with a watchful eye on the forthcoming opportunities. The latter course was made imperative by many reasons, and by Napoleon III himself, who stubbornly refused to give up Rome.

The opportunities from neutrality rose more quickly than had been anticipated. Napoleon III was defeated and taken prisoner on September 2, and shortly after Paris was beleaguered. Rome was abandoned by France, and delay became impossible for Italy. An expeditionary force was sent against the Papal State. The resistance of the Pontiff's army was hardly more than formal, a theoretical protest with some shooting. A few wounded and killed besprinkled with blood the easily forced breach in the walls of the eternal city. Italy entered Rome on September 20.

It was nevertheless a stupendous event. Not only had an absurd national dream come true, but this fulfilment gained a world-wide significance. The temporal power of the Roman Church was over; by the hand of Italy, modern thought put a final seal on whatever remained of medievalism and obscurantism.

But to the Italian mind, relapsing into its usual mood of self-debasement, the event seemed to have happened at a very low expense and in a very subordinate way; the disproportion between its significance and its actual features was felt as extremely disturbing. Italy had not conquered, she had entered Rome; harsh criticism could even claim that she had crept in.

Again and more than ever the history of Italian unity could be interpreted as an episode in the European struggle for balance and hegemony; the conquest, or confiscation, of Catholic Rome, seen under that light, appeared as a by-product of the allegedly Protestant victory of Germany over the Latin and Catholic world.

The German historian of ancient Rome, Mommsen, while sojourning in the Italian Rome, maliciously asked: Now that the Italians are in Rome, what will they do? It is not possible to stay here without a universal idea.

They asked themselves, more or less openly, the same question. For all the luck that had buttressed their efforts, for all the hero-worship with which they honoured their fallen warriors and conspirators, they felt at the bottom of their hearts frustrated and small.

## *Collapse of the Culture*

**I**TALY had not inherited Rome, but many Romes. Several cities lived, or slumbered, on the slopes of the seven hills and amidst the vineyards and pine trees of the outskirts, facing the wild Campagna and smelling the breezes of the lonely sea.

There were the walls and columns and arches of Republican and Imperial Rome, where Petrarch and Cola di Rienzo had dreamed. There was the Christian medieval Rome with its awe-inspiring, shadowy churches, built of pale red bricks, watched by modest bell-towers, breathing an ineffable spell from the low

keyed glow of their mosaics. But the pride of the High Renaissance overpowered both Antiquity and Middle Ages, and the dome of Saint Peter's emulated triumphantly the curve of the sky.

More familiar to the eye and the mind, the Rome of the Baroque met the stroller at every turn of the winding lanes, on every hilltop. There were the operatic flights of stone steps, leading to nothing, or to a friendly heaven, near at hand; and the façades of the baroque churches, eloquent prefaces to nothing, behind which the nothingness or the superfluity—which are one and the same thing—the golden or gilded tabernacles and gates, the hearts and idols and fetishes hanging from the walls, the stupefying swing of the thuribles, the tidal music of the organ, lured princesses and laundresses into an equally facile beatitude. Neither were the Sunday afternoons less pleasant than the mornings spent in the church. Women walked in the mild air: large-eyed, slow-pacing, fattening at an even earlier age than Viennese girls; and between the mass and the promenade there may have been a meal at the *osteria*: the coiling noodles, the roast lamb spiced with aromatic herbs, the strawberries of May or the figs of October, all washed down with three or four glasses of slightly but surely intoxicating Frascati.

Those several Romes lived quietly together, elbowing and not hurting each other: horizontal layers on the same territory. The Italians—or as people were still wont to say, the Piedmontese—when they conquered the city, added another Rome, the Rome of the employees and their wives, of the officers and generals, of the senators and deputies. The king settled in a large and low Papal palace on the Quirinal hill; the Pope withdrew to the Vatican, on the opposite bank of the Tiber, where he proclaimed himself a prisoner. He had started, about twenty-five years earlier, by inflaming the hopes of the Italian patriots; then he had put himself and his state under the protection of foreign, although more or less Catholic, guns; he had had them fire on

Mazzini's and Garibaldi's volunteers; he had denounced the Sylabus in which all of modern science and philosophy and any attempt at reconciling them with the Catholic doctrine were declared blasphemous; finally, he had established himself and his successors as the infallible mouthpieces of God. But he could live on and quietly die in the now godless Rome. The city seemed larger, and softer, than any of its contradictions; and the idyll belied the alleged tragedies. A poet, who was a liberal, nay, a Freemason, and throughout an Italian patriot, shortly before the Pope's death addressed to him an ode and invitation. "Why do you say," he asked him, "that you are a prisoner? You are a prisoner of yourself. I suppose you often remember your native town on the shore of the shining Adriatic sea, and a forlorn yearning for love overtakes your soul. Hallo! open to me your Vatican. I shall take you arm in arm; we must have a drink together: a drink . . . to Liberty."

Another time, in a less cheerful mood, the same poet complained: "They promised us Rome; they gave us Byzantium." But the comparison was far-fetched and unsuitable. Nothing like the Byzantine political gloom and theological insistence was visible in what they called the third Rome. Its atmosphere, undoubtedly Southern and rather Oriental, was of a much gentler sort. For more than five centuries, since Dante, Italy had been the name of an heroic soul, without a body. Now there was a body, but Italy doubted her soul.

As usual, merely economic and social reasons do not suffice to explain the fact.

True, Italy at the beginning was an economically and socially weak organism, with a population of not yet twenty-five millions, mostly peasants and farmers, with practically no industrial equipment, with the poorest imaginable supply of raw materials and natural resources. The percentage of illiteracy was remarkably high. The educational gap between the North and the other regions was wide. The state was a constitutional monarchy, with restricted suffrage, modelled, more or less accurately, on Western

patterns; Cavour's theory of liberty in order and progress in justice was its official religion. But especially the Southerners and the Central populations that had formerly belonged to the Papal State were sluggish in imbuing themselves with the spirit of that new religion; they easily became electoral fodder, subjects and objects of political corruption and profiteering: a phenomenon, for the rest, exaggerated by many historians and, far from being peculiar to the Italy of 1870, well known in several countries of Europe and America. The popular religion, Catholicism, still exercised an unimpaired appeal among the women and the masses, and also in large sections of the leading classes, but it seemed possible to live on good terms with God and the devil, if Liberalism, as the Syllabus of Pius IX had stated, was the devil. Yet many devout Catholics, following the supposedly intransigent instructions of the Vatican, refused to support the profane state, although they faithfully paid their taxes, answered the military draft, and took from it whatever conveniences its freedom and organization might offer. Only, they abstained, or pretended to abstain, from voting, thus proclaiming themselves a class of voluntary outcasts, in the same way in which the Pope, living in the magnificence of his palace, had voluntarily proclaimed himself a prisoner. The protest, practically futile, nevertheless had dangerous implications. There was a kind of state within the state; the unity of the nation was considered defective and provisory; many foreign observers, informed by Catholic propaganda, shook their heads.

However, the needs, both economic and political, of the Italian body were adequately met. No nation ever travelled in so short a time the stretch of road that Italy covered between 1870 and 1914. The Catholic wound was now, or seemed to be, scarring; the suffrage had been extended to all the social classes; legislation was as liberal as in any state of the West; the bureaucracy was, on the whole, conscientious and honest; illiteracy, if not yet eradicated, had steadily yielded ground.

In the technical and economic fields, Italy had not, nor could

it have in the circumstances of that age, grown into a happy and wealthy community; her farmers and engineers could not sow the seeds of gold and coal in her barren soil. But the industrial development, if the almost absolute lack of raw materials be considered, was a miracle of human will, equalled only by the achievements of Switzerland; many thousand miles of highways and railways had been built; the tunnels through the Alps, masterpieces of ingenuity and labour, no less astonishing than great works of art, had opened a semicircle of gateways from the Po valley to Central Europe; the swamps south of the mouth of the Po had been drained; agriculture had improved; the population had grown by one-third; the standard of living had enormously risen. The last to be born among the civilized national states of the West, Italy had taken almost immediately an honourable place in their rank. One thinks of that age of hers, from the annexation of Rome to the World War, as of a healthy, quickly growing adolescence./

But while the body thrived and grew, the soul did not recover. The gratifying or even bold appearances barely masked the disease.

Spiritual trouble can best be explained with spiritual reasons; and although it seems at first impious to charge a whole country, one's motherland, with spiritual and intellectual transgressions, there is no sin in it, if we keep in mind that no nation in its entirety is either guilty or pure, and that the truth underlying such misleading abstractions is that a few men, a few individuals, were guilty or pure in that community, and their bad or good luck made of them the guides of the common destiny.

Intelligence, especially literary intelligence, had created Italy. Intelligence, or defective intelligence in the élite, imperilled the Italian future.

It should now have been patent that not only was the complex of world-ruling Romanism absurdly disproportionate to both the modern world and modern Italy, but that even the Mazzinian plan needed to be chastened. The truth in that plan lay in



the vision of the future of mankind, and of the duty, for each individual and community, to foster it with belief and action. The error was the superstition of a particular mission of the Italian people, a people elect, a redeemer, if not actually a ruler, of the world. The right course would have been modesty with faith, a fulfilling of the nearest duties without ever losing sight of the ultimate goal of all mankind.

But those leaders of the intelligence preferred pride to belief, and since these two did not coincide, since their Italy had not asserted herself either as an irresistible military force or as the centre of the European commonwealth, they rather abandoned the belief. It was no revolution or dramatic apostasy, but just progressive amnesia. They drifted from the ideal system of the Risorgimento, while still celebrating its heroes and deeds in poems, speeches, marble, and bronze.

The adoptive home of their mind was now Germany, their real hero Bismarck. Their weakness made them subservient to the victors of the day.

It was contended that the epic of German unification was another Risorgimento, and Bismarck another Cavour. The parallels were only partly sound.

Prussia, a mighty military power with a hundred battles in the past, among them decisive victories over the great Napoleon, was the unifier, nay, the conqueror of Germany. She did not resemble very much the little monarchy of Piedmont, forced to a work of unification which far exceeded its strength and purpose by a concomitance of ideal and even mystical forces which did not count a great deal in the German epic.

There is no doubt that Cavour was better than Bismarck, both in heart and genius. Bismarck was his disciple, and repeated his technique. But while imitating Cavour in the national purpose and in the devices of his daily action, Bismarck did not care very much for the principles that lay behind his action. He did not believe very firmly in freedom, justice, progress, peace. His most decisive levers were lust for personal power and love, if that be

love, for the greatness of his nation,) heroism and patriotism, a personal and a collective egoism, even if of the glorified sort.

He, Bismarck, not Cavour, was the Machiavellian Prince. The technique of the time in which he lived did not require the murders and common crimes that won Cesare Borgia the praise of Machiavelli. It may, however, be left in doubt whether the falsification of the Ems dispatch belongs or not to the category of common crimes.

He had selected from the wealthy storehouse of German scholarship and poetry whatever fitted his temper: the worship of energy and passion that had perturbed or even maddened the minds of the Storm and Stress writers, Fichte's deification of the German nation, Hegel's sacrifice of his brain to the Moloch of the Prussian state. He crushed all his enemies and achieved the whole of his purpose, finally to recede into the majestic shadow of retirement at the order of his smallish creature, the Emperor King William II, like the hero Orion, who after having won all his battles was bitten to death by a tiny scorpion and metamorphosed by the gods into a constellation.

This constellation—wholly belonging to the unique giant Bismarck—took in many Italian imaginations the place of their eight-star constellation of the Risorgimento, of their unhappy poets and half or totally defeated heroes. Soon they added to Bismarck, Wagner and his fearlessly conquering Siegfried. They added William II, too. When he landed, melodramatically solemn, on the pier of Palermo, and drove to the kingly palace where he was a guest, the crowds gasped at the sight, and fondly remembered that once upon a time their land too had enjoyed the privilege of being ruled by German emperors.

Thus Germany, although German emperors and Austrian marshals had been driven from Italy, conquered Italy again. Again the Italian people, whose glory for nearly two thousand years had been mostly spiritual, admired whatever to its dazzled imagination shone lion-like or even wolfish.

A Southerner, a Sicilian, Francesco Crispi, was the most note-

worthy statesman after Cavour. He had been a Mazzinian and Garibaldian, and had splendidly served in the Risorgimento. Then came, under the spell of Bismarck's personality, the reversal. He tried to suppress the freedom of the nation, rewarding it with power. He dreamed of war against France, of conquest and Empire. An expeditionary force of about fifteen thousand men which he sent against Ethiopia was destroyed by some hundred thousand natives in the early spring of 1896. A colonial defeat, quite understandable under the circumstances, became a national disgrace. Of wailing there was no end; and the world at large was compelled by an impetuous propaganda of self-contempt to believe that the last born of nations was the last of nations.

Either a sober renunciation or a speedy revenge would have been easily possible. Neither was attempted. A deeper furrow of inferiority was carved in the Italian soul. Its leaders, intellectual and practical, were unable both to think like Mazzinis and to act like Bismarcks.

The wound of the African defeat, comparatively slight, healed quickly. The progress of the Italian national body started afresh. But the inner personality seemed irreparably split. There was no answer to Mommsen's question:

On behalf of what universal idea were the Italians in Rome?

But there hardly was a universal idea anywhere else. The collapse of the Italian culture found extenuating, nay, exonerating circumstances all around it.

At the close of the nineteenth century the young poet of England was not Shelley; he was Kipling, another Bismarckian soul, a glorifier of energy and empire. The French poets were in the aftermath of the *décadence*, a decadence of decadence. The Germans, all of them, were crude realists or involved egotists. Ibsen and Tolstoi, far away, had nothing good to say about the civilization of their days, and mightily disliked each other.

Positivism, materialism, technique, had taken the place of Romantic philosophy and religion. Catholicism was a pyramid, and

Protestantism a landscape of scattered ruins. The new religions were cheap. Socialism, to say the least, was a failure.

Italy shared the common destiny. Unluckily it happened at a very delicate moment of her growth.

## D'Annunzio

THE poets and prophets of the Risorgimento had been Northerners. After the Risorgimento the intellectual leadership returned to the Centre or passed to the South: a good sign, in itself, of the achieved unity. For the first time, in six centuries of national literature, the South came into the foreground.

The greatest master was Francesco de Sanctis, the Neapolitan historian and critic. While the Italian troops were entering Rome he was hurriedly working at his definitive book, *The History of Italian Literature*. It was a summary of the Italian intellectual and ethical experience from Dante to the poets of the Risorgimento, and, in the last page, a very hopeful outline of the future. De Sanctis interpreted the past of Italian literature as a kind of Old Testament of the Italian people, a national Bible crammed with laments, visions, and unsuccessful efforts; the record of long trial and error. Everything became clear under the light of the accomplished fact, the independence and unity of the nation. He had been among the accomplisiers of the fact, a teacher, a political prisoner, an exile. His moral authority was matched by the perfection of his literary judgment, by his intimate knowl-

edge of the poetic monuments of Italy, by the candour, if not by the elegance, of his prose. He rendered justice to all the great spirits, from Dante to Manzoni and Leopardi; he drew a sharp, yet not destructive, line of demarcation between the modern and permanent features of Dante's mind and will, and the perishable medieval elements of his belief; he tried to pardon the sin of Machiavelli, upholding against the cynicism of his method the scientific keenness of his mind and the fervour of his patriotism. He mustered all the others, appreciating their results in imagination and beauty, tracing the decadences and the revivals, keeping constantly in mind an ideal picture of Italy as a producer of the beautiful in the frame of the good and the true, such as he would have liked her to have been in the past, such as he wanted her to be in the age to come. His criticism was free and firm, yet filially pious; his new prophecy was courageous, yet considerate and wise. He fully accepted the system of the Risorgimento, combining in a plausible unity its divers tendencies and fusing its contradictions. The realism and modesty of Manzoni were dearest to him, although he, entirely a philosopher and rationalist, was ever far from Catholicism. He could understand the loftiness of Mazzini's plan but could not overcome his dislike for its abstractness and seemingly medieval absolutism. As Manzoni among the poets, so was Cavour among the statesmen the dearest and nearest to him. The future was to him a free, progressive Italy in a commonwealth of free nations. The new Italian literature, of which he affectionately espied the dawn, was to be a New Testament of the Italian people, a continuance as well as a reversal of the Old. To the coming writers he suggested a spirit of truth, science, human faith, honour; a simple popular prose, founded on a sound observation of life; a singing poetic voice, audible in the chorus of a forward-looking and forward-marching mankind. He did not care for world-empire and world primacy. The wish with which he closed his book, namely, that Italy might soon be again among the foremost creative forces of Europe, is quite permissible and

honourable, and does not include any concession to the eagerness of nationalistic pride.

The poet of Italy immediately after the Risorgimento was Carducci, a Tuscan scholar and professor. He was the leader, and even the dictator, of Italian literary opinion for about thirty years, until the end of the nineteenth century. Unlike Alfieri, Manzoni, and Leopardi, who were noblemen, he came from a rather low layer of the provincial bourgeoisie; he also lacked the vastness of Foscolo's outer experience and the depth of Parini's introspection. The range of his knowledge and passion was limited; what he really knew (yet he knew it very well) was Italy from Rome to the Alps, Italian history, Italian, Latin, French literature. He spent practically all of his life in Tuscany and, a few miles from Tuscany, in Bologna, and never went abroad. His intellectual career, although reaching, from several points of view, a high standard of respectability, lacked the steadfastness of continuity, except for his triune fundamental love of poetry, virtue, and motherland. From his early youth he was a patriot, but he did not join the armies and the conspiracies, neither did he don the Garibaldian red shirt, prevented as he was from doing so by his bread-earning task; in other words, by the tyranny of the family group in which most Italians are born and brought up, there to learn conformism and obsequiousness, eventually, to any other kind of tyranny. He was a Mazzinian and a republican, but later on he was unable to resist the applause and the blond smile of the queen of Italy, and he bowed to the crown. He was a democrat and a lover of freedom and peace; he had thundered against Napoleon III and the Cavourian statesmen who were not radical enough for him. But, when the test came, he heartily supported Crispi, the would-be dictator of Italy and would-be conqueror of Africa. He loathed Catholicism and the Papacy, but, grown old, he was deeply moved at the sight of a bell-tower in the melancholy countryside; he listened to the ringing of the bells in the dusk, and he too, although in neo-classic strophes, sang an *Ave Maria*.

All these uncertainties were no unpardonable sins, no venal or cowardly about-faces. Carducci was seduced by the softness of the atmosphere which he breathed, and by the ease with which accommodations were made, in Italy as well as all over Europe, between opposite ideas and conflicting interests. He really would have liked to have a drink with the Pope; and his philosophical and religious education was rather thin, in conformity with the collapse of Italian and European culture. He was no match for a Leopardi or Manzoni; yet in spite of all defects his work remains admirable, often stirring, and his moral and political teaching, in its general line, was sound and pure. He worshipped, too much, the French revolution; he hated the phantoms of the Church and Empire; he knew the real worth of Dante's greatness; and his Rome was the Rome of the civil liberties. Tyrants and conquerors were of no use to his imagination; Cæsar himself was to him a usurper and, besides, a degenerate; he sided with Brutus. In the Dark Ages he saw only darkness, and his mind, a product of the positivistic era, never rose to the understanding of Christ and Christianity. He was unable to see any distinction between Catholicism, Papacy, clericalism, the Gospel, Christianity, and Christ: all together a bunch of lies. To the superstition of the Christ—Whom he deemed to be a teacher of devastating sorrow and moral humiliation—he opposed his own, a less vital one: namely, a Neo-Paganism, no less frigid than the neo-classic sculpture of his age. But, again, his Paganism was no sheer voluptuousness, as it was with so many of his contemporary poets and amateurs, neither was it a Titanic escape from the discipline of society and history. He tried, after all, without any offending show of personal ambition, to substitute a religion of the Sun for the religion of the Son; all heroes and citizens were its priests; its laws were rational and liberal, but by no means lax or perverse; and the gods and goddesses were just metaphors. Conclusively centred in what was desirable and possible, he cherished a very cherishable Italy: a fatherland combining the communes of the Middle

Ages, by whose improvised armies the German Emperor was driven back to his glaciers and woodlands, and this new Italy of the Risorgimento, a daughter of poetry and innocence. The support given by him to Crispi's aggressive policy was, perhaps, a momentary emotional aberration; but he did not write any poem or hymn for the Ethiopian expedition, neither did he ever care for conquests and territories, except for the two Italian border cities of Trento and Trieste, which, as a consequence of the lame victory of 1866, had remained in the grip of Austria. The military force of Italy was, according to him, an instrument of defence, menacing nobody; within her Alps and seas Italy was a self-sufficient historic personality, in the service of all mankind. An echo, not disturbing, not overemphatic, of the Mazzinian prophecy is in the finale of one of his Roman odes. He sees the arches and columns of the ancient glory in the Italian or third Rome, as Petrarch had seen them in the Papal or second Rome. He too wants new triumphs, yet "no more of kings, no more of Cæsars," with their slaves and spoils,

Nay, but your triumph, people of Italy,  
Over the black age, over the barbarian age,  
Over the monsters from which ye  
With calm justice shall set peoples free.

In spite of all discrepancies, de Sanctis should have approved both the personality and the work of Carducci.

But the new man, Gabriele d'Annunzio, was of a quite different race. Carducci could never fully understand him, and wavered between occasional literary praise, mixed with moral warning, and ominous silence. De Sanctis would have stood aghast. All that he had hated in the undercurrents of the Italian tradition, and worse than that, all that he had thought was buried irrevocably in the past, foamed again on the wave of the present.

Nothing ever had been seen like that adolescent who, curly haired, suavely smiling, blond, and azure-eyed, came, after so many conquerors, to the conquest of Rome in the earliest



eighties, just one decade or so after the completion of Italian political unity. He had been born in 1863, a Southerner from Pescara in the region of Abruzzi, formerly belonging to the kingdom of Naples. Nobody ever could have foreseen that the literary and intellectual development of Italy, from Alfieri to Carducci, would have borne its ripest fruit in such a poet and such a man.

Apart from any poetical or ethical judgment, d'Annunzio is the one writer since Dante and Machiavelli whose teaching has had a determining effect on the whole of the Italian mind. Through the channel of Fascist Italy he extended the power of his suggestion over Europe and the world. Now a solitary old man, he can rightly think of himself as one of the driving forces in the history of the twentieth century.

His fortune rose while Carducci's sun still stood high on the horizon. Gradually he took the old master's place, and a much broader one, in the heart and imagination of the Italians, especially of the youth. Acknowledged or despised, he was behind all the spiritual movements and modes from the close of the nineteenth century to the years around 1920.

It is still difficult to evaluate which of the two talents of poetry and action was naturally dominant in his personality. Seen at a distance and measured by its effects, it seems more likely that his instinctive trend was rather toward action. He might have been, or have wished to be, both a Casanova and a Napoleon, a combined atavistic revival of the Italian condottiere and adventurer. There is no reason why he should have felt scandalized at the career of Cesare Borgia, except for his failure. Neither could he have found any moral objection to Machiavelli's doctrine, except for the too great part that the Florentine secretary allows to the fox, as compared with the lion-like qualities of the Prince, and for the humility with which the "popular" or bourgeois writer, dreaming of Princes, did not strive to be a Prince himself. As for Dante, d'Annunzio had once read intensely *The Divine Comedy*, sitting under the olive

trees in the Greek island of Corfu; there, inspired by the sea and the air, he finally discovered the real meaning of the Dantean poetry. Under the mantle of medieval theology and Christian piety, Dante had been the singer of the Titans.

At first d'Annunzio conscientiously thought of himself as the legitimate heir of Italian poetry. He did not even see any thorough-going contradiction between his creed and Carducci's (although, undoubtedly, Carducci was the tutor of the hero, a kind of Chiron, and he, d'Annunzio, was Achilles, the hero himself). Certainly he loved Italy enthusiastically: her language, her art, her powerful glory from ancient Rome to the Renaissance and further. Still, there is a love which strives toward union in a spirit of service; this kind of love may deserve the name of charity; and there is another kind of love which strives toward joy in possession. D'Annunzio's love was of the latter kind.

From Foscolo and Carducci, even from Leopardi, he borrowed the Pagan mythology, yet imbuing its fables with a spirit of glamorous primitivism and anarchical revolt. He also borrowed from Carducci his dislike for Christ and Christianity; but the Antichristian attitude was more sincere and active with the pupil than with the harmless teacher. He did not borrow from Manzoni or de Sanctis the theory of a popular, plain Italian prose. On the contrary, he reverted to a, so to speak, Dantean or aristocratic and lofty—in his case, egotistic—theory of the illustrious idiom. His Italian, which he ever spoke with a heavy, lush provincial cadence, was written with an overgrowth of similes, often baroque, on a constant musical strain, not seldom cheap.

(At first his Titanism was aimless, except for literary glory, pleasure of love, and hunting on horseback in the Roman Campagna with gentlemen and ladies of the smart set.) The Casanovian, rather than the Napoleonic, features were visible in the early struggles of his ambition. No gossip or slander, however, affords real evidence that sadism and crime were actually present

in his doings. Most of what happened happened in his imagination and verse. The poet still had the upper hand.

The Italy of the Risorgimento and the liberal era meant little to him. There is no record that his parents or ancestors might have opposed or disliked the despotism and obscurantism of the Neapolitan kings; and many of his leanings, although he was nothing more than a parvenu of plebeian blood, were toward the black, or reactionary, nobility. He looked contemptuously at the badly dressed Parliamentarians; and he soon learned to call the people the Great Beast. When a few hundred Italian soldiers fell, valiantly and unfortunately fighting, in an African battle, the autobiographic protagonist of d'Annunzio's first novel very quietly declared that he kept aloof from the national emotion over the death of a few "brutes."

Nietzsche, almost universally unknown, collapsed into insanity at the beginning of 1889. Immediately thereafter his name and work had begun to spread. D'Annunzio, a couple of years later, stumbled on a French translation. He felt that he was the Superman.

Except for a few scattered boys, nobody heeded him. It was a rather lonesome grandeur, as Zarathustra's had been.

His energy and power needed a community in which to embody themselves, an earth in which to push their roots. Zarathustra had said: "Remain faithful to the earth."

This happened several years later.

At the end of the century d'Annunzio, not yet forty years old, met his motherland, the Italy of the Risorgimento: her body and soul.

## A Poet Meets a Nation

UNTIL that time d'Annunzio had staged, in novels and plays, only imaginary heroes. They were quite great in their velleities and ambitions, and quite mean in their behaviour. Andrea Sperelli, in *Voluptuousness*, although a Titan in the circular whirl of his self-conceit, had nothing to tell but languorous love affairs in the setting of baroque Rome. Tullio Hermil, in *The Innocent*, upheld, against the hypocrisy of the social law, the right of the supreme individual to be himself; namely, to enjoy sexual and spiritual disintegration and to commit, when need be, infanticide. Giovanni Episcopo, in the long short story of this title, aped externally the gestures of the Dostoiievskian criminals and repentants, while innerly exulting in the fullness of his degradation. Giorgio Aurispa, in *The Triumph of Death*, written or completed when the Nietzschean Superman had already taken hold of the author's mind, ended, after many lengthy speeches and a fit of desperate sensuousness, in a double suicide with his rather reluctant mistress. In the short stories of Abruzzese folk life, collected later under the title *Novelle della Pescara*, the compassionate realism of Verga or Maupassant had been raised to a self-complacent cruelty and glamour; the ignorant and unfortunate people was indeed the Great Beast, very interesting to watch from a good seat above the arena. In his lyric poems, often stylistically and rhythmically fine, d'Annunzio had exhibited himself as a brother of Giorgio Aurispa and all the others, a hungry imagination in a concupiscent flesh. In one of those poems the Chimæra, the alluring monster of desire, addressed Andrea Sperelli, a pseudonym of d'Annunzio

himself. She itemized the programme of a full life. "Wilt thou fight? Kill? See streams of blood? Great heaps of gold? Herds of captive women? Slaves? Other, other spoils? Wilt thou give life to a block of marble? Raise a temple? Compose an immortal hymn? Wilt thou (hear me, young man, hear me), wilt thou divinely love?"

The first two works of d'Annunzio as a playwright, *The Dream of a Spring Morning* and *The Dream of an Autumn Sunset*, were two delightful nightmares of blood and horror. Eleonora Duse liked them. She became the interpreter of d'Annunzio's dramas.

The first great play was *The Dead City*, in 1898. Sarah Bernhardt also liked it, and played it in French. It was an eloquent apology for incest and fratricide. The setting, very illustrious, the dead city of Mycenæ, was borrowed from Æschylus and Schliemann.

Then came *Glory*, in 1899, and in the same year *La Gioconda*. This latter play was another apology for another kind of crime, if the criminal is, or deems himself to be, a great artist.

During all those years d'Annunzio had been secluded, more or less rigorously, in the solitude of the æsthete. Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, and any other kind of English or French decadence had mastered his mind. Italian literature had been to him, more than anything else, a storehouse of phraseology and mythology. There had been no substantial contact between him and the living reality of life.

His approach to politics and Italy was tortuous and slow.

A man is what he does. Until the late nineties d'Annunzio had done poetry and prose, bad, mediocre, and good. He had had women, horses, and debts. He had been a poet and a dandy. But the novelty of his poetry and dandyism is that they were dissatisfied with themselves. His poetry yearned after action, his dandyism after heroism. This is the particular feature which in a way purifies the effrontery of his libido, and accounts for what was to happen a few years later, when his poetical gifts withered

and his active personality acquired a national and universal significance.

Except for some moments of melancholy weariness, he did not seek purification in purity; namely, in moral or religious conversion. He wanted to reach another shore by passing through the boiling waters of contamination and boldly avowed sin.

The vision he had of that other shore cannot be explained by suggestions and environments. Perhaps a case of Mendel's law materialized in d'Annunzio; perhaps there was in him the sudden resurgence of an atavistic type. Culture and environment wrapped the individual phenomenon in the forms of the Renaissance; indeed, not the Renaissance of Michelangelo nor even of Machiavelli, but of the secondary, stray forms of men-of-arms and godless dilettanti.

It is, however, doubtful whether he might ever have been a real Borgia. The two personalities in him, the poet and the conqueror, crippled each other. Perhaps even today, even after his wars and medals, he could repeat the confidence which at the dawn of the century he made to his Florentine barber: "I have experienced all, except the joy of killing." A sparkle of poetic innocence—nay, almost of feminine shyness—still glitters, quite unaccountably, in his wasteful nature.

Occasionally, but seldom, he had tried, since his early youth, to endow his imaginary violence with a collective or patriotic meaning. He had celebrated in a kind of prophetic prose—which no Mazzini, no prophet of the Risorgimento, would have liked—the "matchless human joy" with which the victorious Italian sailors of a torpedo-boat might see some day a big enemy ship sinking "into the unfathomable gurge." A few years later he had published a pamphlet of *Naval Odes*, a fiery homage and prophecy to the Italian battleships. There was in the same sequence a salute to the United States of America, echoing—to be sure, not without the shadow of a misunderstanding—the Americanism of Walt Whitman. This country was to him the one where "everybody, free from any yoke or tie, expands the

power which he encloses in himself, where everybody is his own sovereign, has in himself his own laws, in himself his strength and his dream." Republican liberty was found equivalent to anarchical lawlessness, where there is no freedom for anybody; the America of the pioneers—eventually of the racketeers—flooded the White House of the Washingtons and Jeffersons.

The last generation of the Risorgimento was not yet old, not all Mazzinians and Garibaldians had died, and Carducci was still vocal. The nation at large did not take very seriously d'Annunzio's ideas of fatherland and liberty; neither did he insist, for a number of years. When, in 1899, his *Glory* was performed—a play in which he represented, by means of allusions, the power and failure of Crispi—the crowd hissed loud, and the abortion was hastily buried. No contact had been established between the poet and the national mass.

He had sat for a short time in the Chamber of Deputies, elected by his proud co-citizens of Pescara. At first he had chosen his seat at the extreme Right, a representative of some kind of reactionary and aristocratic feeling; better still, the representative of himself, or, as it was said, the deputy of Beauty. However, it happened one day that the shouts and roars from the Socialist and Radical benches on the opposite side impressed the poet as a manifestation of vigour and life, which his mind opposed to the senescence of his die-hard or conservative neighbours. Then he suddenly rose on his feet and crossed to the extreme Left, exclaiming: "I go toward life." But there was no meaning in the anecdote. Never could he have understood the economic and political backgrounds of Socialists and Leftists. He appreciated in the peasant the gesture by which he, nobly walking, strewed the seeds in the furrow; he loved the workman, whom he was ever unable to think of except in terms of medieval guilds and craftsmanship, when he bent a handle of wrought iron, or blew a glass of Murano, or studded a brocade with foliage.

After the African defeat and the hardships of the economic

depression, the country grew restless, and it came, especially in Milan, to dangerous riots. The poet did not side with the Socialist leaders, who were jailed. He sided with himself. He had settled in the lovely village of Settignano, on a hill above Florence. There everything was quiet. Yet he would grow sometimes uneasy with the restfulness of his abode. Meeting peasants or workingmen of Settignano he would question them: "Why do you not burn the trollies?" Fire, of all things between earth and heaven, ever seemed to him the loveliest.

He was writing his novel *Fire*: no insurrectional or socialist, no actual fire, unless it were the fire of poetic and musical inspiration. The poet, this time under the name of Stelio Effrena, tormented, not quite to death, a great ageing actress, his interpreter and mistress, dreaming at the same time of repeating, indeed of really fulfilling, in Italy the dream which a great barbarian, Richard Wagner, had dreamed only half way. He wanted a national and universal theatre, all for himself, not certainly against the grey-green background of the Bavarian countryside, but on a glorious hill in sight of Rome: there to unite poetry and music, antiquity and future, earth and heaven, in the ecstasy of an endless embrace. But the novel which he had published four years earlier, *The Virgins of the Rocks*, had shown the pretension, however preposterously worded, of deeper-going connexions between his personal ambition and an objective world, or Italy. His assumed name was there Claudio Cantelmo: an idle nobleman, a perfect horseman, whose ancestors had been mighty and cruel men-at-arms. Their offspring Claudio had read the ancient and the recent philosophers, and adopted the word of the Superman. The novelty was his plan of transferring the solitary Titanism of the Superman into the brain of an emperor and king. Cantelmo did not think, as yet, of becoming himself the emperor and king, but he quite earnestly thought of breeding him. Through a kind of eugenics of the will, it should have been possible to generate the King of Rome, the man and ruler of the world to come. Three princesses, three virgin sisters, lived



in a solitary castle within the frame of an heroic, rocky landscape. Which of the three should be the bride-elect, the Mother? With whose help should Claudio generate the King of Rome? He did not decide.

The real king of the third Rome and of Italy, the heir of Victor Emmanuel and Cavour, Humbert, the husband of the queen whose smile had conquered Carducci, died in 1900 by an anarchist's bullet. It seemed for a few moments as if it were the starting shot of a social and political revolution; but the contrary happened. Apparently the regicide, a sacrificial offer, was the vent which the emotional perturbation of the country required; soon after, the nation began to quiet down. Years of rapid material progress, of growing prosperity, followed in Italy as in the rest of Europe and of the world. The first decade of the century was on the whole the happiest time the Italian people ever lived. A statesman apparently adequate to the situation sat at the helm, the Piedmontese Giovanni Giolitti, a tall, healthy, rosy-cheeked man, never young, never old, endowed with subtlety and humour, a thoroughly prosaic and realistic mind, a modest disciple of Cavour with even a touch of Manzoni. He was at heart a liberal, but he did not think very highly of the Italian people at its present stage of social education (in which feeling a shade of Piedmontese superiority was discreetly visible); thus he felt entitled to use some tricks with liberty and to manage, according to his needs, the Southern electorate and the Parliamentary majorities. Neither did he think very highly of politics, which was to him no science, either Platonic or Machiavellian, no mysticism, but merely administration, a matter of common sense. For the rest, human progress and national improvement, unless hampered by stupidity and revolution, were to him truths as safe as arithmetic and bookkeeping. Those Italians who affected to despise him called him a bookkeeper. He did not fit their Dantean requirements.

Neither was he apt to satisfy Claudio Cantelmo and Gabriele d'Annunzio. It was, however, on that wave of all-embracing

optimism that d'Annunzio and the nation, after so many missed dates, finally met. He addressed the new king, when Victor Emmanuel III took the place of the murdered Humbert, with an inflamed poetic epistle in which he praised him, he spurred him, he finally menaced him. If thou wilt not give greatness and glory to the Italian nation—thus he warned—I shall be amongst thine enemies. Everybody enjoyed the monarchical salute—a new sheep in the fold, after Carducci—few if any minded the rhetorical threat. Soon after, a Florentine high school teacher who had read Virgil, Barrès, and d'Annunzio, but mostly d'Annunzio, founded Italian nationalism; in other words, he published a weekly by means of which he wanted to eradicate Giolitti, democracy, and Parliamentarism, to avenge the disgrace of the Ethiopian defeat (whose scar now hardly itched), and to lay the foundations of an Italian Empire under the majestic law of despotism. Never before had the ideal system of the Risorgimento been so crudely opposed or so blindly ignored. But few if any minded the editor or his contributors, who were mostly adolescents either dazzled by the brilliancy of the paradox or misled by a passion of patriotism which seemed to them greater than the greatness of modesty and wisdom; and the circulation of the weekly was not worth counting.

What seemed very good to all the official world and the intellectual élite, and even to the people at large as far as the poor honest people were concerned with such things, was the fact that now, in the era of the new king, there was a national poet again—indeed, the same one whose personal career, whose utterances in things of sex and ethics, had aroused so many misgivings. The old master, Carducci, paralysis-stricken, was now stuttering or silent. The new man took his place. He superabundantly praised any and all the glories of Rome and Italy, from the remotest past to only yesterday; he also adopted the subject matter of the Risorgimento: to be sure, its deeds rather than its ideas, its courage and blood rather than its belief. Among the heroes of the Risorgimento none fitted d'Annunzio's imagi-

nation better than Garibaldi. Had he not been a daredevil, a sailor in stormy seas, an adventurer (even in love)?

D'Annunzio wrote an epic song of Garibaldi. He read it in the theatres of the major and minor cities, following his gigantic script through the gleam of his decadent monocle, turning the heavy pages with a hand as white as the shirt, the tie, the face. His stature was small, his voice icy and nasal, but commanding. The crowds, at last his crowds, unanimously applauded.

Then came his years of poetic glory, the first years of the century: three volumes of poems, an untiring pæan to Rome and Greece and Italy and the world and the sea and the sky and all things that were or are or may be, the grandest orgy of optimism and self-satisfaction ever seen; three plays of medieval or modern incest and murders, flames and horrors, equally satisfying; thousands and thousands of pages in all literary genera. One of the plays ended with the line: "The flame is beautiful! The flame is beautiful!" Another play of a few years later (1908), *The Ship*, a violent and voluptuous celebration of the Venetian Empire, carved into the imagination of the Italians the most comprehensive although rather bewildering suggestion of imperialism and aggression, no matter over what and against whom. The slogan was contained in the line: "Arm the prow and sail toward the world."

He could not yet sail for so far. He left for France. A mediocre collapse, financial in nature, had followed all that glory. His tremendous earnings could not meet his mad, yes, in a way, his heroic squandering. He chose the strangest of exiles, an exile for debts. His refuge was in Arcachon, on the Atlantic shore, not far from Biarritz and Bordeaux.

But he came back to Italy, in spirit, when the Italy of Giolitti declared war on Turkey in 1911 and conquered in 1912 the North African province of Libya. D'Annunzio wrote and sent to Italy his poems and hymns for the war of conquest. They were as loud as gunfire.

Then he came back in person, when Italy was on the eve of

her intervention in the World War, in the spring of 1915. He came from France through the Modane tunnel, showing himself at the train window to answer the cheers of his crowds in the station of Turin, stopping in Genoa. There was gossip about women accompanying him and about bills at the hotels. They have no meaning.

There is a meaning in the fact that he chose, for the delivery of one of his most inflammatory war speeches, the same cliff of Quarto, a suburb of Genoa on the Tyrrhenian coast, whence Garibaldi had sailed fifty-five years earlier with a handful of heroes: not toward the world but toward Sicily and the deliverance of his Italian brothers.

From that same cliff d'Annunzio showed to the new Italy the new road to war.

It was to be the war which many Italians gleefully called "Our War."

## *The Radiant May*

**I**T WAS no d'Annunzio alone who drove Italy to the war. Many forces had been at work in the nine months between July 1914 and April 1915.

Italy herself—paradoxically enough, that very Italy of Giolitti, the peaceable bookkeeper who on Sunday afternoons would bowl with his elector friends in a little Piedmontese town—had first started the big fire.

Nothing was farther from Giolitti's temper than war, and imperialistic war. Yet he was the Italian premier when Italy in

September 1911 declared war on Turkey and sent battleships and troops against Tripoli, the capital of the Turkish provinces in North Africa.

Perhaps, there were German ambitions looming over the Mediterranean, and the old Turkish Empire was certainly and rapidly disintegrating. There was actual danger that another great power might land on the Tripolitan or, as the Italians called it, the Libyan shore, definitely closing Italy in an "iron ring." It could honestly be upheld that in some ways the aggressive war was a defensive or preventive war.

Egypt was British, Morocco Spanish and French, Algeria and Tunisia French. The Italy of the Risorgimento could look at North Africa, with the exception only of Algiers, as at a no-man's-land, possibly open to the free competition of all. No idea of a colonial empire had taken permanent abode in the minds of her poets and prophets. When England prompted her to share in the occupation of Egypt she chastely refused; not only because the government disliked the risk of a fight with France, but also because the popular opinion still vibrated in accord with Mazzinian and Garibaldian beliefs and warmly sympathized with Araby Pasha and the defenders of Egyptian independence. When an easy, though indeed only seemingly easy, opportunity presented itself that Italy might occupy Tunis, her political personality, split between mysticism and realism, made her wavering and irresolute. France took the opportunity, naturally disguising the plunder under the pretext of protecting the Algerian border against tribal incursions; her guns were placed in Bizerta, almost in sight of Sicily.

Only collective sanctity or idiocy could now believe in international virtue and honour. Leopardi had sung, in his *Brutus*, his desperate malediction on virtue; the Italians of 1880 and later, taught by the Bismarckian Congress of Berlin, with all that cattle-selling from which they had come empty-handed, muttered that same malediction in low prose. The Ethiopian adventure of Crispi was in great part a derivative of the Mediter-

anean misfortunes; several Italians earnestly believed that they were fishing in the waters of the Red Sea for the lost "keys of the Mediterranean." Bismarck too, however reluctantly, surrendered to the colonial vogue and cut two large slices for Germany in South-East and South-West Africa.

It would have been sheer hypocrisy to expect disinterestedness and renunciation from Italy after such examples; especially after the example of the British Boer War. Even if only for emotional reasons Italy, or as it must ever be explained, the Italians who cared for such things, could not have suffered the sight of other European fortresses and harbours in North Africa while the Austrian army still camped on the Italian side of the Alps, the British navy controlled Gibraltar and Suez, and the French and British watched, from Tunis and Malta, the narrow doorway between the Western and the Eastern Mediterranean along the coast of Sicily. The ideal system of the Risorgimento had all but crumbled, and the world at large lacked altogether the moral principles on whose authority the Italian occupation of Tripoli might have seemed objectionable.

Giolitti obeyed the circumstances and followed the stream. The diplomatic preparation of the war, that is, the bargain with the great powers in order to be sure about their benevolent neutrality, was a kind of masterpiece in the style of Cavourian technique, although the merit, if this be a merit, redounds in great part to Giolitti's predecessors, Visconti-Venosta and Prinetti. The military conduct of the war itself was adequate. In the autumn of 1912 Turkey signed the Treaty of Ouchy, yielding all the North African territory to Italy, which also had set foot—temporarily, so to speak—on a group of Turkish islands with Greek population in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The military success should have finally deleted even the scar of the Ethiopian humiliation—a good result from the standpoint of national psychoanalysis—provided that one is enough of a political realist to overlook the price paid for it in bloodshed and ethical transgression. As for the practical results, they

were mostly of a negative or preventive kind, at least for the time being. Settling in Libya, Italy had prevented anybody else from doing the same, and found relief from the feeling of Mediterranean suffocation which had haunted her. The conquered land itself was a large yellow desert with a thin border of palm trees and minarets on scattered spots of the coast, otherwise dreary. Those peasants and workingmen who, having listened to the half-official propaganda about Libya as a promised land, wanted to till its blessed soil, to harvest twice a year, and to pluck grapes as heavy as cows' udders, were deterred by the government itself. They stayed at home or followed the wonted trek toward Brooklyn and the Bronx.

An episode among others in the history of the white conquest of Africa, the Libyan war acquired from its very beginning a much wider international significance as a consequence of the technique adopted by Giolitti's government in the challenge to Turkey. The diplomatic preparation in the European field had been subtle; the declaration of war was clumsy and cynical, without the slightest moral camouflage. Italy simply took Libya because she wanted or badly needed it; her law was the law of the *Æsopian* lion, who clutches his chosen share because "his name is lion." The examples of effrontery that could be found in the Bismarckian technique were boldly surpassed, and though it seems credible that Giolitti was misled by confusion and hurry, by the pressure of the so-called national opinion and the fear that somebody else might land in Tripoli ahead of Italy, there is hardly a justification for the cheerfulness with which the *élite* and the youth approved the method. The nationalists were now legion; among them, the loudest of all, a few writers who in the intoxication of politics tried to find forgetfulness of the mediocrity of their work; and some groups of apostates from revolutionary socialism. These people whipped up the passions of larger masses; the political and military fact of the conquest, however partly justifiable in itself, was submerged under a wave of brutal emotionalism. Aggression and slaughter were

praised as beautiful in themselves; war was supreme, the most delightful flower of life. Even the popular anthem, sung by soldiers and crowds, was very different from the modest and human songs of the Risorgimento. It marvelled at the battleships, it praised Tripoli, "sweet land of love," it averred conclusively that "Tripoli shall be Italian at the roar of the cannon."

The roar of the cannon stopped only for a few weeks after the peace of Ouchy. The embers of the fire which Italy had kindled so light-heartedly did not die altogether under the soles of the diplomats; some of the sparks travelled on the winds to the Balkans, where the Slavs and the Greeks felt that Turkey was now weakened enough to become a prey. This was the second fire. Then the Slavs and the Greeks fought among themselves for the spoils. The third fire was also stamped out, but a spark remained hidden in the revolver of the young Serbian conspirator who, in June 1914, assassinated the Crown Prince of Austria. The ultimatum which Austria thereupon served on Serbia was, more or less, in the cynical style of the Italian ultimatum to Turkey.

Now the World War started, and Italy had to face a monstrous, enormous event, in the origins of which her African expedition had had a considerable share.

Her situation at the beginning was, or seemed to be, the most comfortable. She enjoyed an absolute freedom of decision.

True, she was and had been for over thirty years an ally of Austria-Hungary and Germany. She had wanted only an alliance with Germany, to feel sure against any menace whether French or Austrian and to abolish all fear about any Papal vindication of Rome. But Bismarck had warned that "the road to Berlin went through Vienna," and Italy, the Apostate of the Risorgimento, had submitted. The Triple Alliance had been an instrument of peace, namely, a guarantee of the territorial *status quo* and political conservatism, with its points against France and social revolution: a new Holy Alliance, although bereft of legitimism and orthodoxy. Its spirit had ever been defensive;



its strength, quite adequate, had served far more the purposes of Germany and Austria than those of Italy. Now the ultimatum to Serbia—not to speak of the invasion of Belgium—was openly aggressive and destroyed the *status quo*; moreover, the Austro-German intrigue of July 1914 had been concealed from the Italian chancellery. If the Italian leading class had no right to feel horrified at the Austrian ultimatum after what Italy herself had perpetrated against Turkey, the Italian government was legally and morally entitled to denounce the Triple Alliance and to deny its support. Giolitti, in one of the almost voluntary intermissions of his leadership, was vacationing somewhere; Salandra, a Southern Conservative who claimed to be a faithful disciple of Cavour, held meanwhile the place of the Premier. After short hesitations he took upon himself the responsibility of declaring the neutrality of Italy.

There was no flaw in that resolution. It was only an unfortunate circumstance if people at large, interpreting the record of the house of Savoy and remembering certain trends of Italian political science, murmured, quite unrighteously, about Machiavellism and worse. It was human, too human, for the German Kaiser to dub the Italian king a traitor.

At any rate the declaration of neutrality was just a beginning. How was the ship of state to be steered further on? Was it reasonable to surmise that a prolonged or perpetual neutrality might meet all the interests of the nation? There was Italy, entirely free to choose her course, threatened by none, left to herself, and yet terribly uneasy with her very freedom. Salandra, the disciple of Cavour, austere proclaimed that the inspiration of national policy must be "sacred egoism." Why sacred?

Freedom of will often proves to be a heavy burden on man's soul, even when the inspiration finds its source in a religion and ethics. Not always does it appear immediately clear which is the course that conscience in the future will approve as good and true. But if the inspiration is exclusively sought in the practical interests and in the selfishness of the individual or the

group, free will becomes unbearable, since those interests are manifold and their suggestions, confused in themselves, reach a worse degree of confusion in the obscurity surrounding the final issues of the events of which we are part.

There was no reasonable motive, if Italy was led by only practical interests, for not keeping neutral. This was the advice of sound mediocrity and common sense, the same as the Cabinet had given to the first king when he toyed with the wish of joining France against Bismarck. Giolitti stood for neutrality almost at any cost; wisely, if not at all beautifully, he wrote that Italy by means of a well-managed neutrality might get a good deal (*parecchio*) of what she wanted. The majority of the Parliament, of the bourgeoisie, of the sensible and well-to-do people, namely, four-fifths of the ruling classes, felt as did Giolitti. If it were true that the ultimate impulse to modern wars comes from economic greed or fear, no such impulse would have been strong enough to loosen Italy from the safe and perhaps profitable anchorage of her neutrality.

But there were suggestions of a different nature, coming from the "sacred egoism." Indeed, and in spite of the impotent decision of the neutral government, why not join Germany? As long as it was possible the nationalists cherished that plan, though certainly not because of any loyalty to the Triple Alliance or to any other such scrap of paper. In the event of a victory of the Western Powers and Russia, what could Italy hope to gain by joining the anti-German group? A couple of middle-sized or small Italian cities, Trento and Trieste, still in the hand of Austria, with their steep stony provinces, and perhaps a few other crumbs. On the other hand, should Italy join Austria and Germany and win with them, there was a huge imperial booty to share, the spoils at least of France—a Golden Fleece.

No fortune-teller could have told which of the two fighting groups would have been victorious, nor whether or not the intervention of Italy would tip the scale. (Only a moral conviction can inspire a straightforward unhesitating will.) If the morally

inspired Italy of the Risorgimento had still been alive, which course would she have chosen? It is absurd to surmise that Mazzini and Garibaldi would have supported Austria against Serbia, Germany against France and Belgium. They certainly would have wanted war, a holy war, the last of wars, Trento and Trieste, the God-given mountain borders of Italy, a federation of Europe, the world safe for freedom.

That Italy was no longer alive as a collective organism; but a number of Italians lived who had not made apostasy. They opposed any kind of bargain, and even before the Marne battle urged that Italy help France and defend the menaced freedom of Europe.

There was, for about nine months, civil war, though bloodless as yet.

The government, holding the scales of the parties fighting within the country, wavered almost all that time. When, in April 1915, it became clear that intervention was its final choice, Giolitti and the majority of the Chamber, which he still controlled from his retreat, staged an unofficial Parliamentary poll in favour of continued neutrality and acceptance of the modest territorial offers made by Austria in order to avoid the Italian attack. The poll expressed the feeling of the average citizen as well as the economic and positively practical interests of the nation at large. For a few days the government and the nation were in suspense.

Then came the days of the "radiant May." Groups and crowds rushed into the streets of Rome and shouted war. The national poet had come back from France. The Parliament was threatened, the neutralist party was overpowered. On May 24 war was declared on Austria and on the same day the troops crossed the border. It seemed as if the idealists, the offspring of the Risorgimento, had won. A miracle seemed to have happened, as if the soul of Garibaldi had descended into the flesh and words of d'Annunzio and of d'Annunzio's pupils.

But the Cabinet had meticulously prepared and secretly signed

a treaty with the new allies, to make sure about the rewards that should come to Italy in case of a common victory. That treaty, which considered from an ethical standpoint was lamentable, considered as sheer business was idiotic.

Moreover the declaration of war on Germany was silently and almost indefinitely postponed, while the war with Austria went on. Thus the neutralists had their share in the compromise.

The nationalists and imperialists, though sorry at heart that the Golden Fleece of France was not yet ready to be shorn, felt that the governmental compromise which had settled the quarrel between neutralists and interventionists and led Italy to war had been ideally written with nationalistic and imperialistic ink.

They gleefully acknowledged their own share of victory as they and their friends in the bourgeois press headlined, day after day, the news from the Italian front with the three words, *La nostra guerra* (Our War).

Those words meant simply that Italy minded her business, without caring at all about justice and freedom, Europe and the moon.

## Our War

A FEW months earlier they had openly urged military intervention against France and Belgium. Now they had changed sides, not souls.

Now they had gone elbow to elbow, arm in arm, with Socialists and Mazzinians, who wanted war for freedom and Eu-

rope, the last of wars; but the war they wanted was for glory and conquest, the first of their wars.

Their voices had sounded in the same chorus. They had cheered the innocence of Belgium and damned the militarism of Prussia and the obscurantism of Austria. They did not mind the lies. The slogans of democracy and human hope were strata-gems for them, apt to move the masses, and serviceable in the tricks of diplomacy. It was good Machiavellism to join in, for a while.

Thus, the secular song of the Latin peoples, as Carducci had called it, the hymn to Justice and Liberty, rang all over the country. The anthems on the eve of the battle were sentimental and pure, like those that had been sung during the Risorgimento.

The peasants and workers, those in the field-grey uniform and those in the factories and on the farm, gladly learned the songs and the cries. For the rest, they could hardly understand. They had behind them nearly twenty centuries of servitude and misery: from the Cæsars, who had finally trodden down the spontaneity of the Mediterranean civilization under an Asiatic despotism, to the petty tyrants and usurers of their villages; from Nero, the first ruler to persecute systematically within the framework of the state a free religious belief, to the inquisitors and schoolmasters who had robbed all the Southern peoples of Europe of any right to think and grow. They had learned obedience within the walls of their cold, evil-smelling homes, in those hives of family life whose honey was fear and worry; and in the churches, those temples of supernatural hopes where the Kingdom of the Devil was often proclaimed under the name of the Kingdom of God, and Hell was promised to the sinners who did not like to serve and starve. From time to time a few of those sinners had taken to the woods, with their rifles. The scaffold had been their Waterloo. Associations of criminals, especially in the South, the Camorras and Mafias, had tried as best they could to imitate the criminal association of the state. With armed forces and secret tribunals, and with a spirit of

loyalty and solidarity among themselves no less punctilious and stern than Spanish honour, they had levied taxes on the usurers and milked the milkers. But these had been exceptions. The people at large had faithfully obeyed for nearly two thousand years, happy when they were only allowed to kiss the hand of the lord, to hear the swishing silk gown of the lady, or just to cry in frenzy behind the wooden saint in procession that he might bestow an inch of rain on the shrivelled crop of their acre.

These people now—the Southern eaters of spaghetti, the Tuscan eaters of beans, the Northern eaters of corn-meal and rice—marched to the national and supernational war. Whether it was a democratic or an imperialistic war they did not know; they could not even spell such long words. The dawn of the *Risorgimento*, followed by a rather foggy day, had not reached their minds. They hardly knew about Italy, whose common literary language sounded strange to their ears, whose technical progress of the last fifty years, with its roaring trains and tall ships, had amazed their senses rather than enlarged their inner horizon, whose economic improvement, very effective for the upper and middle classes, had not yet raised the standard of living of the masses enough to kindle in their soul a feeling of affection and gratitude toward the commonwealth. In spite of undeniable advance, the first in centuries, still they were a unified plebs rather than a unitary people. They just obeyed, as they always had. Obediently they bled at the front; obediently they starved at home. No nation, except the Central Empires in the last year of the war, suffered as Italy did. A lump of sugar, a pound of butter, nay, a quart of olive oil, were Lucullan luxuries from 1917 on, even for the middle bourgeoisie.

Meanwhile d'Annunzio, amidst Our War, fought His War. He had a rank in the Italian army and before the end he was a colonel. There was nothing to do, in the trenches of mud and stone, for the cavalry, to which naturally he belonged. So he lived in whatever princely hotel or villa he chose, mostly in Venice; and from time to time he went on whatever gallant en-

terprise he pleased, in the spirit of those Ariostean paladins whose whereabouts remained unknown to the Emperor Charlemagne. Often he was driven in his car by his chauffeur, along the front; sometimes he would join a fighting group and embrace a fallen hero; but he delighted especially in a kind of individual venture, largely advertised, as when he, with some Ulyssean companions on a motorboat, glided into a well-protected Austrian harbour just to make fun of the enemy, then safely sneaked back home; or as when he, also with Ulyssean companions, flew over Vienna, an Angel Gabriel, dropping, instead of high explosives, leaflets of high-sounding prose. He was in the Army, he was in the Navy, he was in the Air Force: ubiquitous. But though he was officially registered as a commissioned officer in the Army, he preferred, and adopted on his own authority, a title of the Navy: *Comandante*, Commander, which literally translated into Latin would sound like Imperator, he who wields supreme command. Few at that time surmised that the real suggestion behind the naval title was the remembrance of the Latin word for Emperor.

However, until the end of 1918 d'Annunzio seemed to belong even more to the picturesque than to any terraqueous or aerial department of the war. The war itself went its own way, with alternations of luck and ill luck, victory and defeat and victory again, as happened on all the other fronts. At first the government and the General Staff had believed that the Russian steamroller would speedily crush half of Austria-Hungary, leaving the other half, just in time, to the onrush of the Italian armies; this belief, and the fear thereto connected that Italian help might arrive too late, had sped the negotiations and the propaganda for the intervention of Italy. Then suddenly the Russian army, broken on the Dunajec, started a disastrous retreat, when it was too late for Italy to listen to the suggestions of the neutralists and Giolitti. The advance of the Italian troops was severely resisted, highly expensive, and it was soon stopped. Trento and Trieste, although easily visible from the observa-

tories, were unattainable; Our War became as static as the war on the Western Front. Still there had been no permanent reverse; there had been some smart and extremely bloody successes; and the Italian forces were entrenched beyond the old borders.

The reverse came in October 1917. A general—many say, rightly or wrongly, the name was Badoglio—schemed the daring Napoleonic plan of luring the Austrians into a trap, there to smash them. He opened to them the door of Italy, but as soon as the Austrians had entered the trap they found that for one reason or another the opposite wall was not so strong as the Napoleon had supposed; they broke it and poured like a deluge into more than half the region of Venice. The ambition was tragically expiated, if not by that genius of war, at least by the nation, the army, the poor wretches who, however guiltlessly following the tide of the retreat, were shot at any crossroads or bridge by any general wishing a few salutary examples to restore discipline. It seemed as if the army and the country were lost. Some people visioned the Austro-German armies leaping from Venice to Florence and from Florence to Rome, there to deliver the Pope from his prison in the Vatican.

This was the defeat of Caporetto, the most famous in the World War, not because it was bigger and worse than all the others on the other fronts—than, for instance, the British rout at Saint-Quentin in March 1918—but because the Italians wanted it to be the biggest and worst and, yielding once more to their complexes of inferiority and despair, broadcast the name of Caporetto, with a feeling of burning shame, to all the continents and seas. As far as the facts and not the emotions were concerned, the Austro-Germans did not even enter Venice, and were stopped on the left bank of the Piave. The resistance of the troops, with only nominal help from the Allied Powers, became adamant; and the battle on the Piave in June 1918 was a classic victory, the first on all the Allied fronts, the turning point in the fortunes of the World War and the first irreparable crack



in the military structure of the Central Empires. In the following months the German Western Front gradually weakened, Bulgaria and Turkey deserted the field, and the last Italian victory, in late October, was won at an appallingly high price of blood, when the issue of the World War was already virtually decided. But Italy had fought her war to the end, had taken her share of sacrifice and military honour, and had thoroughly destroyed the military power which she had faced. <sup>2</sup>

It was, however, clear now to all—as it had been clear all the time to some thinking minds—that such a war could not pay, even supposing that a war can ever pay, if the reward had to be sought in the promises of the Treaty of London, drafted in April 1915. As early as 1916 the government had given some signs of uneasiness, which steadily grew in the following year, proportionately to the losses of the armies and the sufferings of the people. There were rumours about the need of raising the bill, which indeed in 1915, before the first shot of the first soldier and the first tightening of the average citizen's belt, had been set too low.

The treaty provided for a loan of one billion gold lire, about two hundred million dollars, to the Italian treasury: a spoonful in an ocean of expenses. It promised Italy, in case of a common victory, Trento with its Italian province, north of Verona and, besides, the two hundred thousand Germans who lived in Bozen and Meran, in that part of Tirol south of the Alps, which geographically was the utmost section of the Italian peninsula, although it had never played a part in Italian history. This concession was willingly made by the Allies, especially by France, with the secret hope of keeping open for ever a rift between Italy and Germany. Trieste, the Austrian outlet to the sea, a city of Italian majority and culture, was also promised to Italy, with the adjacent territory, peopled partly by Italians and partly by Slavs more or less closely related to the Serbians. Another coast city, smaller than Trieste, but equally Italian in the language of its majority, was withheld; neither had the Italian government

wanted it. This city, which the Treaty of London left to "Croatia," was Fiume, the Hungaro-Croatian outlet to the sea. Farther south, on the eastern coast of the middle Adriatic, the treaty awarded to Italy a section of the Austrian province of Dalmatia, with the large harbour of Sebenico, some deep desolate fiords, and plenty of barren mountains. Some hundred thousand Slavs peopled that territory; among them, or rather almost entirely grouped in the tiny shore town of Zara, lived about ten thousand Italians, not yet forgetful of the Venetian dialect and the Venetian Empire, to which the Dalmatian coast once had belonged. Finally, the Treaty of London promised Italy, very vaguely, some compensations in her African colonies, should the British and French Empires become larger after the victorious war.

When the government and the political opinion of the country began to feel uneasy about the Treaty of London and the rewards that were expected after an unexpectedly long and severe trial, their attention, strangely enough, concentrated almost wholly on the problem of Dalmatia.

They wanted more of that land; Zara and Sebenico, as offered by the treaty, were not enough. An outcry started, and rose in the black and blackish press, asking for Trau, Spalato, Ragusa, Cattaro, possibly for all the eastern coast of the Adriatic sea.

The Italian people, who had gone to war obediently singing of Trento and Trieste, had now to learn from a harsh political prose the never-heard name of Dalmatia.

## *Dalmatia*

WHY did it happen? What was the meaning of the Dalmatian episode in the World War?

There was no geographical or ethnical contiguity of that country with Italy. Its lovely Venetian churches and the echoes of the dialect of Venice, fossils of an extinguished empire, had no more actual validity than the Genoese stones in Constantinople and the Roman remains in England. Nobody had ever thought of an Italian Dalmatia in the Risorgimento: Mazzini had wished the unity and freedom of the Southern Slavs, to whose race the overwhelming majority of the Dalmatians belonged, and a Southern Slav state linked by intimate friendship to Italy in the commonwealth of the European nations; Tommaseo, an Italian author and scholar of the Risorgimento, born in Sebenico, had openly declared that his native region did not belong to Italy, whose boundaries he set at the ridge of the Alps, in conformity with the Dantean and later tradition. Even after the Risorgimento the Italian jurists and sociologists—most noteworthy among them P. Stanislao Mancini—had developed a consistent doctrine of nationality. That doctrine was extremely liberal and spiritual. The substance of the nation was set in the national soul and will much more than in geography, or in economics, or in a race, or even in language and culture. Those people were entitled to constitute a nation who wanted to constitute it in the freely chosen unity of a human group. There could now hardly be a doubt that all the Southern Slavs—namely, those classes of the population that were concerned with national problems—wanted a united state of Yugoslavia, however intricate and thorny might appear the way toward either

a democratic federation or a centralized monarchy under the Serbian dynasty. In July 1917, when the Serbian territory had been totally overrun by the Austro-German armies, and the Serbian government with the scattered remnants of the army had taken refuge in the Greek island of Corfu, the Southern Slav émigrés from Austria-Hungary, among them Ante Trumbić from Spalato with other Dalmatians, convened in Corfu with the Serbian politicians and drafted a declaration or statement of belief aiming at the freedom and unity of all their peoples.

These evidences and reasons did not deter the Italian nationalists; instead they spurred them on their way. Ostensibly they claimed that the Slavs, supported by the violence and fraud of the Austrian government, had pushed to the wall, or to the sea, the Italians of Dalmatia as well as those of Istria, the small peninsula jutting south of Trieste into the Adriatic; they refused to acknowledge the accomplished fact, they untiringly remembered that until thirty years earlier an Italian had been the mayor of Spalato, now called Split by the barbaric usurpers. Whatever partial truth there might have been in their statements, it was more than counterbalanced by the indisputable fact that the population in the interior of Istria and in the territory of Trieste had always been Slavic. Had Italy annexed, as everybody wanted or granted, not only Trieste and the Italian communities scattered along the Northern Adriatic coast, but together with them all the adjoining territory in order to reach the natural Italian boundary at the Alps, several hundred thousand Slavs would have come under Italian rule. It was no proportionate compensation, but only fair, to leave the ten or fifteen thousand Italians of Dalmatia to their Slavic state. Zara, a township quite Venetian in character and language, lying on a tiny stretch of land almost entirely surrounded by the sea, might be severed from Yugoslavia and given to Italy without any deadly danger for the friendly relations between the two Adriatic peoples. As for the few Italians who would have become citizens of Yugoslavia, it would not have proved difficult to obtain serious

guarantees for their freedom of language and culture. It had been unwise to claim even Sebenico and all that section of Dalmatia which the Treaty of London promised to Italy. The interests of Italy lay in a peaceful collaboration with all the nations, especially with the smaller among them, and in an honourable fidelity to the principle of nationality which had inspired the Risorgimento. To claim beyond Zara, beyond Sebenico, Spalato, and all the rest, was sheer folly or worse than that.

But few Italians, beside the historian Salvemini and the Socialist leader Bissolati, were well informed or courageous enough to say such things. The nationalists, when their throats were sore with national propaganda, when they felt that they had shouted enough about Slavic barbarism, the jewels of Venetian architecture, the lofty palace which the Roman Emperor Diocletian had built in Spalato, passed to the military argument. It would be terrible, they asserted, if another state could ever repeat the Austrian naval menace against Italy, hiding its fleet in the labyrinthine and impregnable fiords of the eastern coast. All the dead of Lissa (the naval battle of 1866) would rise from the depths of the sea to protest against the treachery. Italian cannon should be set all along the coast, from Trieste to Cattaro. Indeed, the people at the General Headquarters of the army were rather puzzled at the paradox of a naval strategy which, in order to have safe harbours on the eastern coast, wanted at the same time to have a considerable strength of the army immobilized on the land border of Dalmatia, if those harbours were to be safe from attacks from behind. The total security of the navy involved a dangerous dispersion of the land forces and, in consequence, a diminution of the security of the country. It could also have been objected to nationalists and admirals that it was possible to obtain naval security in the Adriatic by means of international agreements demilitarizing the Dalmatian coast. But no objection or reason would have been heeded by the nationalists, whose minds, far from being ruled by actual national interests, were driven by emotional and ideological fury.

What was really at stake in their minds was the meaning of that war, of the World War, and of war in general.

There is no doubt that the World War had been represented by propaganda and also by many of the official documents of the Allies under an unprecedented light of idealism and justice. As soon as Austria handed her ultimatum to Serbia, trying to suffocate the independence and honour of a weak nation, Russia, the mother of all Slavs, drew her sacrosanct sword from the sheath and stood for the lamb against the wolf. Then Germany drew her sword, plunging it into the breast of another lamb, Belgium. England, horrified, entered the arena in defence of the innocent. There had never been such a dramatic staging of a war; no struggle for power since the Crusades had been so mystically interpreted as a religious fight, a duel of Good and Evil. The ordinary slogans spoke of civilization and barbarism, of democracy and militarism; but under those colloquial terms there was a deeper feeling, thoroughly religious, as if the common belief of all our history, no matter whether embodied in Plato or Isaiah or Christ or Rousseau, faced in an ultimate trial the diabolical powers which stood for force and cruelty. For the first time in history there loomed on the horizon of mankind the hope, nay, the belief that war might end for ever. Poets and prophets had expressed that hope, yet setting its fulfilment somewhere in a remote future. Now it had descended upon the anguished souls of the millions, as an imminent promise. The soldiers who panted and bled on the slopes of Verdun, of the Karst, even of the Carpathian range—since Tsarism was incidental, but the substance of Russia was Christian—all the victims were Christs, who died that all the others might live: redeemers. Even hatred, racial and national, against the Germans and the Hungarians, was discredited and held sinful. The ruling classes of Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Junkers, magnates, and professional warriors, bore the guilt alone. Imbued with the doctrines of Bismarck and Pangermanism—this recent offspring of the old Machiavelli and of the older Satan—or,

more plainly, driven by their own wickedness and greed, they had perverted a small part of their peoples and subjected the rest. While they threatened their neighbours they had their heels on their brothers' necks. The end of the war, the catastrophe of those ruling classes or gangs, was to have been the dawn of the German nation and of the other peoples which the German and Austrian war-lords had enslaved; freedom and brotherhood were promised to the winners and the defeated alike.

All those who infallibly possess the truth are sure nowadays that all that was a farce. The idealistic propaganda was forged by the General Staffs. The World War was, in Germany as in France and everywhere else, the "racket" of the ammunition makers. The profiteers lured America into the road to war.

Had these wise economists and sociologists ever happened to see the vultures and crows feeding on the corpses of the fallen soldiers they would contend, with the same scientific right, that the vultures and crows had planned the war. The author of a deed is he who profits by it!

At any rate, those idealistic beliefs, forged or not, existed during the war. They existed also in Italy.

Not only had Bissolati, the ascetic leader of the moderate Socialists, the aged volunteer of war, supported ever since the beginning, long before Wilson, a thoroughly humanitarian and collective interpretation of the war. Not only had this man gone so far, so naïvely far, as to proclaim himself, when visiting the French front, a soldier not so much of Italy as "of all the nations allied for the sake of freedom." But also other people more scientific-minded agreed in the main with Bissolati's purpose. Salvemini and his friends contended that egoism, sacred or not, never pays. At any rate, a wise "egoism" should have suggested selflessness to Italy. It was to her interest to see the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, her hereditary enemy, ruined and dismembered. This could not happen unless new or enlarged national states rose from the Austrian ruins: particularly Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. It was in the interest of Italy to have

friends, and markets, in Central and Eastern Europe; the conquest of Dalmatia would not only have been morally a blemish but practically a blunder, sowing the seed of an ineradicable discord between Italy and the new Europe and making of Italy a pawn again in the chess game of the bigger powers. The Europe which Salvemini and his friends visioned was the Europe of Mazzini: yet sobered, proportioned to the real opportunities of history in that stage of its making, without any mystical claim of Italy's primacy and leadership. A human standard of living for the humble classes, with an honourable motherland in a regenerate community of the European nations, sufficed their ambition.

Such tendencies were deemed by the Blacks to be extremely dangerous: they insisted on Dalmatia, on all of Dalmatia, not because they really cared about the harbours or the Venetian bell-towers. They did not care for Dalmatia in itself. It was to them a symbol. They wanted hatred and strife for ever. On top of all their wishes was the wish to humiliate idealism and hope, to prove to themselves that history is and ever will be blood and iron. Dalmatia served the purpose amazingly well. Indeed, if Italy conquered the "other shore," as they called it, a wedge would be driven, a gap would be opened between herself and the new nations which were rising on the idealistic doctrine of the war for freedom and democracy. That gap was also between Italy and her noblest past, from Dante to Mazzini and Cavour. Italy, the lovely country which all the world had loved and which Manzoni had praised for belonging among the humble and oppressed, would have taken her place in the ranks of the oppressors. The World War, as a religious war, would have been irretrievably lost.

The government as usual held the scales, tipping them slowly but steadily toward the Black side. Three Premiers had been successively in power during the years of Our War: Salandra, whose record, quite honourable from several points of view, can be forgotten by history but whose winged word of "sacred ego-



ism" will be ever remembered; Boselli, an insignificant old man; and finally, from Caporetto to Versailles, Orlando, a Sicilian lawyer and publicist, a subtle and open mind, a sensitive heart, a finely shaped human nature, with the sole drawback of an irresolute will. However, the governmental continuity of the country had been represented by Sonnino, who was the Secretary for Foreign Affairs in all three ministries. He had a better social education than most of his fellow-statesmen of the time; he knew by heart some cantos of *The Divine Comedy*—especially those praising the Roman Empire—the meaning of which he badly misunderstood, and he spoke English quite well. Although half Jewish he was a die-hard Conservative, in close and even intimate relations with the Court. Perhaps his secret model was Disraeli. He liked Italian nationalism, which he no less badly misunderstood, thinking it was just a brand of intensified and rejuvenated patriotism. His mind was as narrow as his forehead; his will as obstinate as his chin. But in spite of will and chin he, utterly unpopular, had never been able to stay in power longer than a hundred days. Salandra, his colleague on the benches of the Right, appointed him to Foreign Affairs. There, since the foreign policy of the wartime was secret, he did not have to dread Parliamentary majorities; so he could stay, and he stayed, undisturbed, to the end.

At first he would have liked to see Italy run on schedule and fight on the side of Germany and Austria, her legitimate allies. But neutrality having been declared by his immediate predecessor, he stuck to it. Soon he started the negotiations with both sides which led to the Treaty of London and Italian intervention. He compared, carefully and realistically, the Austrian proposals with those of the Allied Powers, and accepted those of the latter. He was not very keen about Dalmatia at the start. He even said to the Italian ambassador in London: "I should have preferred to live and let other people live." But the insistence of the Department of the Navy, where the best among the admirals needed new harbours and fortresses with the promotions

connected therewith, while the worst among them, working for the "*roi de Prusse*," plotted to drive a wedge between Italy and the new allies, easily prevailed over his brief hesitation. In the ensuing years he did the best he could to improve the Treaty of London, now desperately disproportionate to the cost of the war. But he did not ask from the Allies what Italy really and badly needed: outlets for an emigration not to be enslaved by foreign plutocracies, a fair distribution of raw materials, opportunities in world trade and world labour, or maybe a share of Africa. What he wanted was territories, and Roman territories, columns and arches to restore. He asked for a slice in Asia Minor and for another slice in Dalmatia.

The Asiatic slice was conceded (on paper). The supplementary slice in Dalmatia was withheld. This happened in 1917.

Nevertheless Sonnino had the Treaty of London, with Zara and the district of Sebenico. When he went to Paris after the armistice he showed the paper to the Allies and to the associate power, America, represented by Wilson.

Sonnino spoke very good English, but Wilson did not understand him.

## *The Will to Suicide*

THE writer of this book, whose activity had so far seemed almost exclusively confined to the field of literature, had been chosen by the General Staff of the Italian Army, as early as July 1917, for the purpose of making a political inquiry in Switzerland. He and the professional diplomat who was to accompany him were believed to be able to find out

whether the Croats and Slovenians, Southern Slavs of Austrian citizenship living as émigrés in Switzerland and elsewhere, were real political exiles and conspirators, or agents of the Austrian government; and whether the queer word "Yugoslavia," never heard before, had any meaning at all or was merely an Austrian trick contrived to ensnare Western opinion and to lure the Western powers into a separate peace with Austria, thus cheating Italy of the promised rewards. Many in the high places of the Italian armed forces and Foreign Office, probably including Sonnino, inclined toward the latter supposition.

The writer, like nearly all in his literary generation, had felt in his early youth, or rather adolescence, the spell of d'Annunzio and nationalism. But he had quickly recovered. He was free from any prepossession, as was his diplomatic companion. There was no need of intricate detective clues; the strictest and, at the same time, the most obvious method of historical research led them to the conviction that the motives behind the action of the Southern Slavic exiles were as honourable as those of the Italian exiles during the Risorgimento, and that Yugoslavia, not yet a reality, was a political possibility of the near future. They suggested to the Italian government and high command that they take this fact into account. It was, they contended, not wholly wise to stress such territorial claims as could make Yugoslav feeling irreparably inimical to Italy. Stressing, on the contrary, the common source of Yugoslav aspirations and Italian national unity in the liberal ideal of the nineteenth century, when Mazzini and Tommaseo had been among the announcers of Yugoslav freedom and unity, would have proved profitable both in the diplomatic and the military field. Many of the soldiers fighting under the Austrian banner were Yugoslavs; the supreme commander of the mightiest Austrian army which the Italians faced was Boroevic, a Southern Slav himself. Loyal propaganda explaining the solidarity of purpose of Italy and Yugoslavia in the Europe to come might have weakened the resistance and shortened the road to Trieste and to peace.

The report which the two missionaries presented to the general who had ordered the expedition was highly praised and deeply buried. Not even the commander-in-chief or the Premier was allowed to poke his nose into the secrecy of its pages.

Then came the rout of Caporetto, three months later. The ideals of democracy, of righteous peace, of international brotherhood, were hurriedly unearthed from among the rubbish where they had been dumped. A new song, the Song of the Piave, became the national anthem. It said nothing of conquest and primacy, it did not even name the mountains and rivers of the promised provinces beyond the border. In simple words, modulated on a hearty but tender strain, it praised the lovely river Piave—running from the scented Alpine woodlands to the Venetian countryside—whose very voice averred: "The stranger shall not pass—*Non passa lo stranier!*" National defence, harmless independence, God-given unity were the inspiration of the song. The best spirit of the nineteenth century was lent again to a war which diplomacy had contrived as a bloody trade, and which a considerable section of the Italian élite had surlily interpreted as the first step to national and international oppression.

Under the impending menace of personal and collective disaster the nationalistic wave subsided for a while.

The writer was called to head the Office of Press and Propaganda, under the premiership of Orlando. His opinion was that the salvation of Italy and Europe, as well as the only possible and worthwhile result of the war, if it was to be victorious, lay in a renovation and adaptation of the Mazzinian plan. Italy, in the commonwealth of nations, would have had a particular task, ideally consistent and realistically reasonable, in a leadership, freely exercised and freely accepted, of the minor nations arising from the supposed dismemberment of the Austrian monarchy. These new nations, together with Italy, would have built a bloc strong enough to counterbalance any hegemonic ambition on the European continent and to insure peace with justice for all.

In January 1918 Wilson proclaimed the fourteen points of

his peace plan, mentioning Italy at the ninth place and vaguely promising "readjustments" of her frontiers. He thoroughly ignored the Treaty of London. The rank and file of diplomacy and nationalism were stricken with alarm; yet the situation of the army, doggedly but dangerously entrenched on the right bank of the Piave, very far not only from Spalato and Cattaro but also from Trieste and Trento, prevented them from any bold counter-offensive against the American intrusion. The chief of the Press Office spoke with the Premier and won his support for a political action which should have combined the Italian ideals and interests with the American peace plan, and while averting the menace of a separate peace with Austria, should have brought together in an honest compromise the territorial claims of Italy with the aspirations of the other nations working and fighting or conspiring for the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy. The theory that was at the root of this practical scheme consisted in the belief that no international or supernational organization of Europe was conceivable until each of the nations of Europe should own and rule its own free state, whose boundaries must be drawn as impartially and justly as the fragmentariness of the European ethnical and linguistic map and the interplay of the economic interests would permit.

Authorized by the Premier, and helped by several politicians, Italian and foreign, he convinced the leaders of the Austro-Hungarian émigrés in Paris and London. Benes—the most fervent and far-seeing of all—Trumbic, other Czechoslovakians and Yugoslavs, a delegation of Rumanians and Poles, boarded a reserved train in Paris one night of April 1918 and landed all together in Rome: at last the third Rome, in the spirit of Mazzini. Some Serbian statesmen, coming from Corfu, joined them there. Their kingdom was in the grip of the Austro-German armies; only failure and defeat, haloed with absurd hopes, camped on the Western and the Italian fronts; Poland was just a dream. None the less those people were convening to discuss the consequences of the victory and to distribute the spoils. It might

have seemed fair to suppose that their minds were not wholly sound.

The Congress, "of the oppressed nationalities of Austria-Hungary" under the leadership of Italy, was held, semi-officially but solemnly, in a superb hall on the Capitol. An aged Italian statesman who had seen the days of the Risorgimento presided. A joint resolution, which naturally avoided too delicate precision in the description of future boundaries but which expressed in the most definite form the purpose of brotherly collaboration as the foundation of a new Europe, was unanimously approved in a thunderstorm of applause. Italian politicians and journalists of all shades, from the reddest Left to the blackest Right, sat in mixed rows, all participating with equal or almost equal enthusiasm in the cheering chorus. One of those journalists was Benito Mussolini, the managing editor of a rather secondary Milanese daily paper of limited circulation and doubtful influence. He had been a revolutionary pacifist; later he had joined the party of interventionism under the sign of freedom and justice for all nations. He quite naturally agreed with the spirit and the resolution of the Congress. Orlando, the Premier, warmly welcomed the assemblymen. Sonnino, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who had known about the plot but thoroughly ignored it, kept aloof: probably feeling in the core of his mind that even the silliest propaganda and the most puerile illusions might prove of some help, as long as the military issue of the war was still in suspense. That very opinion, however, was openly expressed by one of the Blacks while pacing up and down the railway station of Rome and greeting, together with the others, the Slavs arriving at the "Eternal City." "As long as the war lasts," he said, turning more or less discreetly toward a couple of his friends, "we'll utilize these people; when the war is over and victory is ours, we'll — them." Thus saying he raised one of his arms in the obscene gesture which was not yet the Roman salute.

The resolution of the Congress had been called the Pact of

Rome, with an implicit opposition to the Pact or Treaty of London. It did not belong in the files of the state; it was no official diplomatic agreement. It seemed, however, to inspire most of the official action in the ensuing season. Even the General Staff, although doing its best to cripple any inter-Allied attempt at a unity and co-ordination of the military command, although fostering in its own way a kind of strategical "sacred egoism," used eagerly whatever material was offered by the Office of Press and Propaganda, and distilled from it millions of leaflets, full of Mazzinian and European idealism, to be spread among the Slavs fighting on the Austrian front. Meanwhile Sonnino, irreplaceable, sat at his desk, waiting for events.

They came: very gratifying to his heart as far as the Italian military victory was concerned; very perturbing because of the dismemberment of the Habsburg monarchy, the sudden collapse of German resistance, and the flight of both Kaisers. He had done whatever he could to prevent such a preposterous course of events; he had stubbornly opposed the enlistment of a Czechoslovakian and a Yugoslav legion of volunteers on the Italian front, since the whereabouts of those alleged nations could not be found in any dictionary or atlas; he had honestly hoped that history would prove sensible and that England would somehow come to a tie or compromise with Germany, about which latter nation he had an idea that came to him through channels of an English education, quite adequate to the times of Carlyle and the Prince Consort. Now history had gone mad and the things that happened were too tall for him. However, harnessed with his character and protected by his full-sized blinkers, he did not yield one inch. Whenever an event or a reason surpassed his intelligence his usual reaction would be a sudden flush reddening his cheeks like burning coals.

He did not think of any device or plan which would be adequate to the novel circumstances. He did not have the faintest idea of what American intervention meant, in war and peace. He simply went to Paris, there to unfold the Treaty of London.

Lloyd George and Clemenceau knew it too well; England, France, and Russia—now absent—had signed it, more or less reluctantly. Wilson had only a second-hand knowledge of it. To him the Treaty or Pact of London was a scrap of paper, or worse than that, a compact for a pound of flesh, exhibited to a world court by a top-hatted Shylock.

There is hardly a doubt today about the judgment that must be brought on Wilson's character and action. No Senatorial committee of inquiry at Washington, D.C., no historical prosecution, will ever blacken the purity of his purpose. If genius is an extraordinary human power in the service of one idea, Wilson was a genius. His meaning in world-history increases as time goes on. He was the man who, in September 1918, proclaimed the unity of the world, the League of Nations. The idea was no invention of his own. Utopians, philosophers, and poets had cherished the dream of a united mankind, free of hatred and bloodshed, and even the dire Achilles at the earliest daybreak of our civilization had pronounced, in a sudden pause between slaughters, a prayer that all strife among men might cease. In the nineteenth century the dream had appeared so clearly to Mazzini as to seem an hallucination. It had not been unfamiliar to the rulers and autocrats who had schemed, upon the downfall of Napoleon, the Holy Alliance, and to those who shortly before the World War had constituted the World Court at the Hague. Socialists and Tsars, Jews and Orthodox, had rendered at least lip service to the deity of Brotherhood. The Allied powers, which had shielded Serbia and Belgium against the aggressors, had already acted in the spirit of a united mankind or said, at least, that they had acted so. Even the Roman Congress, in April 1918, had been a miniature model of a world to come. But Wilson transferred all those Utopias, velleities, and precursory signs into a definite political will, which in its turn seemed to be embodied in one of the mightiest nations on earth. The declaration of September was no Dantean vision in a castle of rhymes; it was a word on the point of a sword: the most significant of hu-



man events since the downfall of the Roman Empire and the dismemberment of the ancient unitary world.

This was the deed of the great man Wilson. There was also a little man Wilson living in the same brain and heart: a self-conceited professor, authoritarian and vain, deaf to objectors, unkind to advisers who did not anticipate his own conclusions. The concomitance of greatness and smallness is a usual phenomenon in human beings, even in the greatest of heroes; it shows particularly harsh contrasts in a mind mastered by a practical purpose. The prominent features in Wilson's smallness were an American hurry after immediate returns—he was unable to think of ideals invested in a distant future—and a scholastic stiffness by which he, thoroughly convinced of the truth of his mind, overlooked whatever humorous or painful contradictions life opposes to the squareness of a geometric will. Of nations and their boundaries he had an idea as broad as the continent on which he had been born. Those European controversies about the national apportionment of a hilltop or of a couple of fig trees were pettiness, or sheer madness, to him; he felt that the good, straight scissors that had cut so well the boundaries of Arizona and Dakota might work no less nicely in the sensitive, sickly tissues dividing Germany and Poland, Italy and Yugoslavia.

As for Italy herself, he certainly knew about Dante and Mazzini, and he could not agree with the Machiavellian temper of the Italy of his day. Sonnino, the stubborn, made him ever more stubborn; Orlando, the pathetic, excited his curiosity without melting his Anglo-Saxon distrust for sentimentalism. Undoubtedly he liked the Yugoslavs too much, whatever truth or falsehood there may be in the alleged feminine plot that according to Italian rumours was behind that inclination. His protective attitude encouraged those among the Yugoslavs who maintained that Trieste itself was a Slavic city, and who like the Italian Blacks had sat in the Roman Congress with the secret purpose of using the glamour of that idealistic ceremony as a stratagem of war until victory and peace came, and with peace the strife over the

spoils. Hence the increased difficulties for any attempt at a conciliation between the Italian and the Yugoslav delegates. The followers and inspirers of Sonnino widened the rift, and poisoned its edges, since what they wanted was hatred, not peace.

The writer and a philosopher and politician whose name was Giovanni Amendola called on Orlando at his Paris hotel a month after the armistice and had a long interview with him. They both reminded him of his attitudes and pledges during the war; they warned against the dangers of an enmity between Italy and the new nations, of an estrangement between Italy and America; they made an appeal to his understanding patriotism that Italy might follow the course which was prescribed by the coincidence of her historical idealism with her actual interests. The Premier listened without the slightest mark of impatience or discord; he answered profusely; while vehemently protesting his unbending fidelity to the idealism of the Risorgimento, he none the less pointed out that further discrepancies between him and the Minister for Foreign Affairs might prove deadly to the fatherland and that the navigation, among shoals and sand bars, must be utterly cautious.

Of Orlando and Sonnino the latter was by far the stronger: not indeed so much because he wore better clothes and spoke excellent English and adequate French while Orlando had no English at all and his French was occasionally hard to understand, but because Sonnino knew what he wanted and Orlando did not. It has been said that Orlando wanted a popular triumph, and therefore listened to the nationalists' voices, not very numerous but shrieking, deafening. This surmise heaps undeserved injury on the reputation of an honourable man; but he had a lawyer-like attitude which made him responsive to the reasonings of even those who were farthest from his natural feelings. Sonnino was in those weeks and months closest to him, and his insistence, even more intrusive when silent than when outspoken, seized hold of the other's mind. Orlando, as a Premier, was on the stage with the other big three; in fact he was not so big, not

only and not so much because his nation was smaller than America, England, and France, but because his nation and his mind were split, and somebody pulled his strings.

Thus, the course of Italy was chosen.

She had gone to war with all her body. Six hundred odd thousand peasants and workmen—among them a certain percentage from the bourgeoisie and a few score from the intelligentsia—had fallen on the Calvaries near Trento and Trieste. The crippled, the maimed, the sick for life, were innumerable. A huge amount of the national wealth had been burnt to ashes.

She had gone to war with both her souls. They had struggled with each other as long as the external war had lasted, for three years and six months. Finally, while the body of the nation lay exhausted, bleeding, half dead after the inhuman effort, the bad soul defeated the good one.

It was a fateful issue, to Italy and to the world as well.

An unparalleled victory had been bestowed on Italy. She alone of all the fighting nations had seen it through to the final destruction of her enemy. Austria, the hated political structure by which she had been oppressed in the past, had crumbled. Italy alone, surrounded from now on along almost all of her Alpine border by weaker states, had reached military security, nearly insularity, which all the others on the Continent, and especially France, vainly striving toward the Rhine, might have envied. Menaced by none, cherished by most, in the midst of a pacified world, she might have been headed for a future of spiritual glory and social progress, for the fulfilment of all that she had hoped for during centuries.

She forfeited that opportunity, suicidally.

As for the world at large, nothing might have seemed more reasonable than the expectation of an intimate collaboration between Italy and America. The interests as well as the backgrounds of the two nations coincided. The American Constitution was a corollary of eighteenth-century philosophy: America, the daughter of Enlightenment, was the elder sister of Italy,

the daughter of nineteenth-century liberalism. Regardless of the underworld schemes of racketeers and profiteers, and of the dry makeshifts of diplomacy, the American people had gone to war unfurling very candidly their eighteenth-century beliefs. Those beliefs did not differ from the system of the Risorgimento. Practically and economically, America wished what Italy needed: peace, collective security, freedom of trade and of the seas, opportunities for all. It seemed hardly credible that such a concordance might be broken over a clash about the poorest province of Austria, which was at the same time, perhaps, the land in the world where the least number of Italians lived. But the incredible came true.

If Wilson had met with friendship and assistance in another great power, if America and Italy had gone hand in hand, Wilson's knowledge of the European circumstances and men would have been better and his chances for an honourable peace in accordance with his principles and points would have risen enormously. The American President and the Italian Premier together would have been able to resist the push toward a Carthaginian peace that came from France and England. It is fair to suppose that, if Wilson had returned to his country with an honourable peace treaty, the opposition of the Lodges and of all the other hundred-percent Americans against the League of Nations and any kind of American entanglements would have been much weaker.

Abandoned to himself, befogged by his ignorance of the details, and spurred by his hurry for a result at any cost, Wilson fell headlong into the pitfall which cleverer people than he, the Clemenceaus and Lloyd Georges, had been digging in front of his distraught steps. The existence of Russia, a rather considerable portion of the world, was ignored, not so much because she had deserted the Allies in signing a separate peace with Germany as because she had gone Communist. The excommunication was, clearly, to be valid until the Tsarist generals and the White Armies, generously supported by Western money and

Western advisers, had turned back the clock of history. Thereby, an imprint of class struggle was stamped upon the war which had been the war for democracy and equality and which now became, in the eyes of many, a fight of two capitalisms, the winner no less hateful and murderous than the defeated. The Italo-Yugoslav issue and a few others were left undecided. For the rest, the readjustment of European frontiers, a most delicate operation on the most sensitive nervous tissue on earth, was performed with the aid of a butcher-like, or at least barber-like, method of surgery. The Arabs were betrayed, the Turks were—theoretically—exterminated. African, Asiatic, and other territories were speedily transferred from one owner to the other, tribes and nations following in serfdom the destiny of the ores, oil, and rubber to which their destiny was bound. Germany, who had cast down her arms and ousted the Kaiser at the waving of a Wilsonian white flag which promised equality and justice, was made to kneel down at Versailles, in a ceremonial expiation for Bismarck's victory of forty years earlier. She signed the confession of her guilt, she gave up whatever territories were claimed by the Allies and their creatures, she promised heaps of gold which she had not, brooding on revenge—and on bankruptcy, legitimate in that case. The League of Nations was allowed to come to the world, with neither Germany nor Russia, with not even America. America, who had given birth to the baby, left it unnursed on the threshold of a foundling hospital at Geneva. The last of wars became in the eyes of many just the worst of wars: the most monstrous of slaughters with the most shameless of frauds.

The World War had been a cataclysm, in which the forces of heaven and earth had mingled. It would be a logical or chronological quibble to say that Italy had been its author, only because the guns of the Libyan expedition played the prelude. She was merely the one who unconsciously, and with all possible extenuating circumstances for that time, carried the fire into the immediate neighbourhood of the big powder-keg.

Also in the disintegration of the post-war period huge forces of heaven and earth were at work. Neither does the behaviour of the Italian delegation in Paris exonerate the ill will of Clemenceau and Lloyd George, far more effective and purposive, or the blunders of Wilson, more disastrous. However, what is being outlined in these pages is the trial and error of Italy, not of America or other nations.

It is proverbially stated that the step of a careless climber, the whistle of a forgetful shepherd, may start an avalanche, although they have not heaped the stuff of which it is made.

The Italian nationalists and Dalmatomaniacs took up the part of that climber or shepherd. Besides, they were not so careless or forgetful. Approximately, this time they knew what they were doing.

They started the Black Age.

### III

## Beginning of the Black Age





## Wilson Quits

**T**HE Treaty of Versailles was sealed in June 1919. The Italo-Yugoslav issue remained undecided until November 1920.

Wilson had paid an official visit to Italy at the beginning of January 1919. In Rome he said, as good-humouredly as he could, that several million Italians, American citizens or residents, lived in America, many of them in New York; which was no reason, added he, why any Italian should claim the territorial possession of New York. The audience, liking it or not, understood the warning against the annexation of Dalmatia. The applause, at the end of the address, was as unanimous and loud as could be desired.

He also went to Milan, which was at that time the melting pot of Italian political parties and passions. A gala dinner was given in his honour in the foyer of the Opera House, La Scala. In the square below, crammed with people who had eaten a speedier meal, there was no end of "*Viva Wilson.*" The heads of the populace, under the dazzling illumination, glowed like a fabulous garden of tulips in the sunshine.

Three men sat casually near each other at the utmost right end of the horseshoe table in the white-and-gold foyer. One of them was Senator Albertini, the managing editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, which was by far the largest and most influential daily paper in Milan and in all the country; the second was the writer of this book, who was at that time the foreign editor of that same paper; the third, whom the other two scarcely knew, was the managing editor of a second-rate paper in Milan, *Il Popolo d'Italia*. His name was Benito Mussolini.

When all the guests, after the toasts and the cheers, rose to their feet and crowded round Wilson to have the menus autographed, those three were not interested and lingered in their corner talking on. Their voices were restrained and tense; the two from the *Corriere* talked more than the man of the *Popolo*, whom they, involuntarily but unmistakably, looked at from on high. His worried, unsmiling face tried hard to conceal under the mask of obduracy a painful feeling of inadequateness, the fear of slipping into misstatements and historical errors. When the others, on the ground of an evolutionary conception of history, had finished explaining to him the consistency and feasibility of the Wilsonian plan for a League of Nations, he conclusively opposed them by the iterated shrug of his shoulders and rumble from his mouth.

His notoriety had been so far confined to one section of public opinion, namely, to the one which had been and was directly interested in the evolution and inner strife of the Socialist party. Only a few days later, on an evening of that same January 1919, did he come into the focus of a more general attention.

This happened in the same theatre La Scala, although not in the foyer where the gala dinner had been offered to Wilson. This time it was in the large, packed auditorium which had resounded with so many melodies. But no music was heard that night.

A lean, ageing man in ordinary clothes stood on the stage amidst a group of his friends. It was Bissolati, the Socialist leader and volunteer of the Allies. His voice was as lean as his body, entirely destitute of sensuous mellowness and cheap emphasis, but the stress which made it clearly audible all over the house was that of pure and permanent conviction.

He read a speech that was a statement of belief. He did not want Dalmatia; he did not even want South Tirol with its two hundred thousand Germans, in spite of its waters running toward the Italian sea and its mountains bulwarking the Italian valleys. He wanted the League of all Nations and a Wilsonian or more than Wilsonian peace, which should make the world safe for justice and freedom.

Half of the speech or so reached the audience.

A few score of people jammed the shadow or leaned their elbows on the velvet parapets of the boxes at the right of the orator: ordinarily the frames of diamonded décolletées.

One of them was Marinetti, the futurist poet. As a talented and wealthy youngster, he had boasted of his international make-up, having been born in Egypt, and having indifferently spoken and written Italian and French, although much more in the latter tongue. His bachelor's home had been indifferently in Paris and Milan. In one of his early pamphlets he had made cruel fun of d'Annunzio, divulging some evil-smelling gossip about this poet's private life. In one of his collections of lyrics, *La Conquête des Etoiles*, he had conquered the stars, galloping on a sequence of syllables, meaningless but space-devouring, which echoed somehow the neigh of the steeds and the outcry of the Valkyries in the Wagnerian opera. Late in the night, often until daybreak, he had been used to sit in a sidewalk café, shouting and gesticulating among friends as loud as he. Several not belonging to the party had occasionally joined it, and taken pleasure in whatever brilliancy might shine on the surface of the Franco-Italian poet's flood of words: a brilliancy of the kind which the Italians, with a term as fitting as untranslatable, call *genialità*: namely, something that gleams like genius or gold, although it is not.

In 1909 he forged the lucky word Futurism, and founded the futuristic school. It was an outdoor school, and very much so, although not quite Platonic. Its slogans, as enunciated both in Italian and in French, declared utter contempt for Romanticism, sentimentalism, and all the past with its museums and cemeteries, or, as they said, with its "moonshine," and installed in the place of all such rubbish the solar cult of the futuristic future, whose highest rituals were to be "the fisticuff, the sprint, and the kick." The twentieth-century religion of sports and muscles had its John the Baptist.

Gangs of intellectual desperadoes, scribblers, jinglers, and daubers, naturally or artificially dishevelled, came year after year to

him. Although at that time they would paste on the canvas the bristles of their shaving brush if they had to paint a man with whiskers, or write *tuff tuff* when they wanted to tell of the march of a locomotive, five or six among them had potential attitudes which they later developed in their own ways. The large majority, however, remained fools for all their lives.

All together they wandered from one city to another, and appeared, Barnum-like, on the stages of the opera houses, there to perform and evangelize. Courage, not talent, was all they needed; and they had it. Intrepidly they welcomed the potato peels, rotten eggs, and other garbage with which ribald audiences rewarded their spiritual efforts; the thicker the hail the greater they felt their triumph. The orgy of publicity and scandal which had boomed d'Annunzio's glory had been an insipid tea-party compared to this new kind of bacchanal. The plan of those fellows, fairly successful, was to make havoc of whatever had been fine and delicate in a poetical tradition of over six centuries, and while scoffing at democracy, to apply to literature the shrillest methods of demagoguery. Had there been nightingales singing in the immortal groves of Petrarch and Leopardi they would have been hushed to death.

It was a Falstaffian farce, parodying in one stroke the Roman gladiatorial circus, the modern Luna Park, and the electoral mass meeting. The Falstaff who produced it was personally brave. When, instead of garbage, bullets started to hail in the Libyan and Balkan wars, Marinetti liked it. He went as a visitor to the siege of Adrianople, and wrote about it a book in which the ta-pum of the cannon and especially the delightful typewriter-like tinkle of the machine guns were fondly recorded. War in general, no matter who the winner or the vanquished, was supreme to him as a nearly complete show of the futuristic machine age and a matchless performance of futuristic noise. He went also to the World War, on the Italian front, and was also wounded—whether severely or not is irrelevant to the story.

This man sat among a group of his disciples in a box of La Scala,

at the right of the speaker, on that January evening of 1919. The training of his voice was superb.

For a few minutes Bissolati was allowed to go on, seemingly undisturbed by the confused murmur of the hall. Then at a given moment, as if an invisible baton had given the sign, the infernal symphony began. Squeaks, shrieks, whistles, grumbles, nearly human, and all the thinkable counterfeits of the wild pack's howling, made up the bulk of the sound wave; but a human, nay, a patriotic cry became distinguishable now and then and ruled the inarticulate mass with the rhythm of a brutal march. They said: "*Croati no! Croati no!*" meaning that they were not Croats, that they wanted no friendship with Croats or Yugoslavs; and they meant too that Bissolati was a Croat.

He withstood the trial and multiplied the resources of his voice. Some protests in his favour—too human, indeed, to prevail over the beastly symphony—arose from other sections of the theatre.

But when he was approximately at the middle of his speech something unexpected happened.

Mussolini was in the theatre. He and Marinetti, however different their tempers—the one never smiling and the other often heartily laughing—were close friends.

Now suddenly Bissolati recognized Mussolini in the chorus: that unmistakable voice, dishearteningly wooden, peremptorily insistent, like the clacking of castanets.

He turned his head to the friends who were nearest to him and said in a low voice: "*Quell'uomo no!*"—"I will not fight with that man!"

From that moment on he read his pages only as a formality, to himself. No applause was audible at the end. The crowd, part triumphant, part impotently disgusted, cleared the theatre.

Thus Futurism had conquered the finest opera house of the country. Perhaps at the bottom of Marinetti's heart, it was a literary celebration: a smart onslaught on the good manners and traditions of the past.

But Mussolini meant it otherwise. And the political consequences of the incident were far-reaching.

There had always been a considerable breadth of tolerance in modern Italy, at least in the large cities and in the conflicts among leaders. The hereditary dogmatism of the Italian intelligence had found a countercheck in the equally hereditary and almost instinctive trait of the old nation, which had learned in thousands of years the best lesson of history, namely, that intellectual passions vanish, while benevolence lasts, and that the suggestions of the heart are safer than the pretensions of the mind. This sweetness of Italian life, in spite of poverty and strife, of ecclesiastical and social tyranny, had ever been inspiring to foreigners visiting the country, and it was this rather than imitation of the English Parliamentary institutions that made up the particular kind of Italian liberalism which was more psychological than theoretical or political.

One often had the impression during the most heated political debate, or even during a riotous strike, that it was rather a showing off than a showdown, and that immediately thereafter those people would drink together, patting each other's shoulders. At any rate no one could remember that a man as respectable as Bissolati, who had been considered as Aristides the Righteous and whose moral flawlessness had been a standard to both followers and opponents, had ever been treated with the ruthlessness of that evening at La Scala. It seemed as if a deadly blow had been struck at freedom of speech and thought, and as if a second civil war, even if still bloodless, had started immediately after the end of the external war.

On the other hand, the Government and the delegation at Paris now had the lead which they wanted. It was clear which of the two souls of Italy had more might, or at least that lust for fight which is the root of might. Sonnino, and the people around him, thought that the outbursts of nationalistic passion in the Italian cities might impress Wilson.

They wanted the Dalmatia of the Treaty of London—at least

that part of Dalmatia, since further requests in the presence of America were utterly impossible—and besides, the city and territory of Fiume. The city was in majority Italian, the territory Slavic. It would have been perfectly wise to claim the city, and necessarily the surrounding land which was tied with it, on the ground of the national principle which was to shape, according to so many promises, the new map of Europe. But in that case the national principle should have been acknowledged, without too many mental reservations, in all other fields, and a general negotiation should have been started on the assumption that not all commas and dots in the Treaty of London were sacrosanct. The facts, however, were: first, that a diplomatic treaty promised Italy a section of Dalmatia; second, that a national agitation in the city of Fiume (which the same treaty, signed by the same Sonnino, promised to Croatia, now a part of Yugoslavia) wanted union with Italy. Therefore one of the delegates, the Jewish lawyer and politician Barzilai, wrote down in an official document that Italy felt quite at ease in insisting on both Dalmatia and Fiume, since the former was guaranteed by the sanctity of the treaties on whose letter Italy had entered the war, and the annexation of the latter was beyond any arguing a consequence of the principle of self-determination on whose holiness America had joined the war and Wilson had crossed the ocean. "Thou didst not think that I was a logician," said the devil in Dante's *Inferno*. This time it was the pun of a third-rate sophist; but to its author and his mates it seemed to be the peak of Machiavellism. They really did not see how Wilson and the Allies could escape the masterly trick.

Even at the end of February, Orlando, meeting at the Franco-Italian border the foreign editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, and being asked what would, according to him, be the best policy for the paper to follow under those circumstances, emphatically answered: "Wilson! Wilson! Wilson!" He meant, and he explained the meaning, that no lasting peace, and even no satisfactory settlement of the Italian problem, might be hoped for unless the collaboration with Wilson proved effective and the leadership

at Paris did not fall from America's hands. But the slope of the events was now more slippery than Orlando's brakes were steady. In April came the final clash between the Italian delegation and Wilson and the Allies.

Orlando and Sonnino deserted the peace conference, thus breaking the united front, shrinking back to the "sacred egoism," and plunging Europe again into illimitable possibilities. What had they in mind? It would have been sheer madness to suppose that their secession might bring about the collapse of the Paris conference and a new entente between Italy and Germany. It would have been childish naïveté to hope that the manifestations of the Italian crowds and Parliament after the schism might change the mind of Wilson and the Allies, who knew accurately that Italian public opinion was managed from on high, and that the police and the censorship, still ruling the press according to the laws of war, did as the Government pleased. However, it seems that the wisdom of those statesmen consisted barely of that naïveté. They planned a big performance of national enthusiasm and protest which should astonish the world. Maybe by chance, maybe not, a Saturday evening was chosen for the dramatic departure from Paris. The ministerial train went through boroughs and cities from the French frontier to Rome, on a lovely spring Sunday, while bourgeois, workmen, and peasants enjoyed the holiday strolling in the balmy air. These crowds rushed, more or less spontaneously, to stations large and small, the latter often pink and red with geraniums. With shouts and cheers they expressed their patriotism, embittered but unbending, and their love for Dalmatia. During the war, and long before, they had heard about Trento and Trieste, waiting for redemption. Now they had learned the names of two small towns in Dalmatia, Sebenico and Spalato, which they supposed to be large Italian communities, enslaved by somebody or other and yearning, they too, for Italian redemption. Nay, they had learned to put the accents on the right places. Until a few weeks or days earlier the average Italian had constantly mispronounced Sebènico and Spalàto.



The performance was gorgeous, and so were those of the ensuing days, in Rome, in the Parliament, in all the bourgeois press, with the one exception of the *Corriere della Sera*. But Paris failed to be impressed; neither was Germany, blindfolded and chained, in a situation to mind any wink that might come from Italy or elsewhere. To begin with, the Allies and Wilson agreed that Smyrna, with that part of Asia Minor which had been promised to Italy, should go instead to Greece. The agreements about that territory among Italy, France, and England were formally imperfect; besides, the Wilsonian principle of self-determination seemed clearly to favour Greece and Venizelos, since the inhabitants of Smyrna and some other localities spoke Greek. The news barely reached the Italian ears, which were completely filled with Sebenico, Spalato, and Fiume. Few if any at that time acknowledged the blessing in disguise which the treacherous Allies had bestowed on Italy, and the gift of the Danaï with which they had gratified Greece, whose armies shortly after were to feel the disastrous impact of Mustafa Kemal and his reconquering Turks, thereupon to tumble into the Aegean sea in front of Smyrna, burning to ashes.

While disposing of Asia Minor and such other secondary matters the Big Three, Wilson, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George, worked on schedule, sedulously concocting the brew for Germany. Then the Italian Government felt the chill of isolation and suddenly decided to return to Paris. This second part of the play, the march from Rome, was as hushed as the march from Paris on Rome had been boisterous. Modestly, almost mysteriously, Orlando and Sonnino with secretaries and experts boarded a night train. No crowds were allowed at the stations.

Having arrived, and being amiably but not dramatically welcomed, as if they had just taken a short vacation, the Italian delegates had indeed little to do. Their return had been suggested by the wise adage that absent people are always wrong and by the fear that the whole map of Europe might be drawn anew, without Italy and against her. But the demarcation of the Italian fron-

tiers toward Yugoslavia, since no friendly agreement seemed reachable, was postponed to a rather indefinite future; and even the treaty of peace with Austria and the demarcation of the Italian northern border were, at least formally, deferred until autumn. All that the Italian delegates could do was to attend the final meetings and formalities about the treaty of "peace" that was to be forced upon Germany. For colonies and raw materials, for oil and gold, for all the needs of poor, proletarian, overpopulated Italy, almost collapsing to death under the economic consequences of a war disproportionate to her resources, they could not care at all, deafened by that din of Dalmatia and Fiume, Fiume and Dalmatia. The Allies were spared the trouble of betraying Italy, for which task Italy herself volunteered. Neither did Italy, official Italy, care for justice and peace, and for the German delegates who, having read the draft of the peace treaty, righteously although impotently contended that it violated all the promises of the Wilsonian peace. The passions which stood behind the Italian delegation and pulled its wires did not desire that anything like a Wilsonian peace might come into being; they longed for the stultification of all war idealism, and they had it. The delegates listlessly countersigned whatever bill the Big Three chose to hand over to Germany, just securing for their country a few lumps of German coal and a handful of crumbs from the lavish but poisoned meal of the reparations. They finally countersealed the document, or Peace of Versailles, which ruined Wilson, estranged America, fettered Germany, and plunged Europe into the Black Age. The Post-War Era had begun.

At last Orlando and Sonnino, with all their Cabinet, were forced by a Parliamentary vote to resign. This happened nine days before the final ghastly ceremony at Versailles, when Germany, after having ousted the Kaiser and proclaimed a democratic republic, was ordered to take on her shoulders the crimes of the dispossessed regime, and to endorse her own death sentence: a formality which so far no penal code had requested from a convicted criminal. Immediately thereafter Wilson, the long-

faced, sailed back over the Atlantic, now more than ever an abyss between two worlds.

As for Orlando, history most seldom had offered an equally striking example of how little avail brightness of mind and kindness of heart if a resolute will does not choose the way. His faith and eloquence had mightily enhanced the military and national resistance after Caporetto, his intelligence had sighted the road to peace; but he did not dare. Six years later, in 1925, he was to head the last constitutional fight, against Fascism, in a rather confused municipal election in his native city, Palermo. It was too late. Another ten years later, in 1935, he was to come out again from his dignified obscurity, promising full support to Mussolini in his struggle against the League of Nations and thus reverting to the logic of his perplexity and to the position of Versailles.

Sonnino in his turn had given an exemplary instance of what little use there is in a resolute will if mind and heart do not inspire it. He died four years after the catastrophe: no doubt on excellent terms with his conscience and thoroughly convinced that history had run and was ever running on schedule.

Under the vicarious leadership of both an unprecedented miracle of psychopathic alchemy had been performed. Italy, or at least the intellectual and political élite to which an evil destiny had entrusted Italy, had transubstantiated a victory into a disaster.

Now all of them could number the beads of their dearly loved rosary of the national failures: the military defeats, the diplomatic humiliations: Novara, Villafranca, Custozza, Lissa, Berlin, Tunis, Aduwa, Caporetto, Versailles.

The nation, masochism-stricken, exulted in frustration.

## Fiume

“FASCIO,” or bundle, had been a usual term in Italian politics before and during the war. At first it had designated Socialist revolutionary groups in Sicily, in the early nineties. Later it had meant a temporary alliance of different parties, especially rightist, for electoral or other purposes; it had also meant the temporary unity of all national-minded groups, in the Parliament and in the country at large, to foster military and moral resistance against the enemy.

Mussolini, as early as March 1919, adopted the word and founded a new movement under the name of *Fascio di Combattimento*, literally the Bundle for Combat. The programme was as comprehensive as the membership was scant; the fifty persons or so who assembled in a room at Piazza San Sepolcro in Milan wanted at the same time nationalism, socialism, republic, revolution, order, international peace, League of Nations, Dalmatia, and Fiume. The only clear feature was that they wanted Something, nay, Everything.

So far, it was not important. The hour of Mussolini had not yet struck, and d’Annunzio’s star still stood high on the horizon.

The poet was now only superficially interested in poetry: an essence whose too delicate taste faded unnoticed on a palate which had grown accustomed to the hard drink of action. He had had some gulps of that drink, in propaganda and war; he wanted more.

He was just a colonel, or at best a self-appointed Comandante without any command, an Imperator with no empire. At fifty-six years of age, with a literary glory rather on the wane, he felt like one of the unemployed; more fittingly, like a demobilized re-

serve officer. He loathed divesting himself of the uniform, on which he had pinned a threefold row of medals.

Peace seemed to thwart his hopes for a metamorphosis and to blight his so far promising record as a national hero. A few days before the armistice he was heard to say in Venice: "I smell the stench of peace."

Then he wrote some grandiloquent poems, in very lengthy lines, against Wilson and Wilson's mouth, full of false words and false teeth. The contumelies were impartially directed at America and at Serbia, or Yugoslavia: a nation of hog-keepers and hogs. Having been born on the western shore of the Adriatic sea he felt entitled more than anybody else to claim Dalmatia and all the eastern shore.

The editor-in-chief of the *Corriere della Sera* published them. He was misled by that kind of orthodox liberalism which grants liberty also to the stranglers of liberty; perhaps he was also fascinated by the personality and fame of the writer. The poems were served to the readers in far larger types and more conspicuous setting than the editorials and news in which the editor and his staff upheld Wilson and urged peace.

Soon after, the poet groomed the dusty classical metaphor of the *mutilated victory*. "Our War" had finished in victory, but of the mutilated kind. At other times he explained that Italy had celebrated thirteen victories, on the Carso, on the Isonzo, on the Piave, on the Alpine front, but that now at last the fourteenth battle was to come, and nobody this time would be allowed to cripple or rape the Divine Virgin of Victory flying in the wind of her wings. The myth of the fourteenth victory was wantonly carbon-papered in the editorial offices of the Blacks and chorally echoed around all the coffee sherbets with whipped cream in the political cafés of Rome: which city had grown irrecoverably tired of having been for about fifty years the third Rome, and was now longing for her fourth self. Several of those people, journalists with low salaries and go-betweens from ministerial antechambers

to Parliamentary lobbies, had not gone through the classical high school, an unavoidable stage of middle and superior education for the upper classes in Italy. The glitter of d'Annunzio's style, like that of Venetian glass, and its redundancy, stuffed with reminiscences of Greece and Rome, swelling with pseudo-biblical and pseudo-mystical perorations and finally spiced with a most curious terminology, both excremental and sexual, were highly intoxicating to those barbarians. While learning by heart the poet's prophecies and diatribes they experienced a spiritual advancement and a class promotion.

At first it was not clear on what front the fourteenth battle should be fought. There was, around all that buzzing and fizzing, an atmosphere of "sailing toward the world": the rather vague direction which d'Annunzio had suggested to the Italian ambitions at the close of his play *The Ship*.

Then the hatred, cold-bloodedly kindled but now feeding on itself and attaining a certain degree of sincerity, began to stretch and roar against Nitti, the new Premier after the resignation of Orlando.

Nitti's record and capabilities were, from several points of view, very good. He had an excellent training in finance and administration, a cultured mind, a respectable experience in university teaching and civil service. He was comparatively young. But his feeling toward the war had seemed suspicious, although he had early severed his responsibility from that of the neutralists and Germanophiles. Neither he nor any other visible personality in the Italy of those times had endorsed a condemnation of war based on the general principles of Tolstoi or of a conscientious objector, and even Nitti's most ambitious conviction, namely, that war does not pay, seemed at least so far to express rather the mind of a financier than the temper of an apostle. He seemed all prose, and throttling prose, to a few hundred martial poets. In the war ministry presided over by Orlando, of which he had been a part, he had kept constantly lukewarm, caring more for an honourable peace than for an endless slaughter aimed at the smashing victory

of one and, as he thought, at the ruin of all. He had frankly opposed, in the Cabinet, the plan for a last Italian offensive in October 1918, judging it unnecessary, both from a diplomatic and a military standpoint, and bound to be all but a bloody parade. Such an attitude, however commendable to the philanthropist's eye, seemed politically blameworthy, since Nitti, while not able to forbid the bloodshed, succeeded in postponing the battle until it really was emptied of much of its meaning and the adversaries of Italy—namely, her allies with their Yugoslavs and Czechoslovakians—felt entitled to contend that the victory of Vittorio Veneto, whose tremendous cost they managed to overlook, had been meant just as a show of prestige.

These and many other offences which they ordinarily labelled as high treason were imputed by the Blacks to Nitti. Even his personal appearance, fat and round, which a courteous friend might have likened to Cavour's, became a target for their contemptuous sarcasm, and they utterly disliked his voice, to the soft Neapolitan cadence of which he added a lazy stress of his own, half bitter and half conceited.

On the other hand, while he was vehemently abhorred by his enemies, he was not adequately loved by his supporters. They found an obstacle in his ironical mood and in the self-indulgence with which he would relax from his absorbing work by sharpening jokes and witticisms, often quite pleasant and born rather of versatility than of malignancy, but glittering with a cynical surface which did not seem to fit the gravity of the circumstances. Moreover, his political eloquence consisted, too insistently, of gloomy presages about isolation, hunger, and breakdown that were impending on Italy; fear, rather than hope, was the medicine by which he tried to treat the nervous diseases of the nation. This was cowardice to the braves from the front, and especially from the backfront, but it was defeatism, or at least disheartening pessimism, to many who would have liked to help the Premier unreservedly. His democratic conviction, albeit fully sincere, was tinged more with distrust in the opposite theories than with faith

in democracy itself, and he preferred to disbelieve in nationalism rather than to believe in internationalism and to propose the League as a goal for the near future. On the whole his personality, however remarkable, lacked the authoritative appeal which comes from a constructive rather than from a critical frame of mind, and which alone makes, in momentous days, the leader.

Therefore his enemies seemed stronger than his friends, and he seemed to his enemies weaker than he really was. They began to brood, not so secretly, over whether or not the fourteenth battle might be fought on the Roman front. The city, with practically no business, no factories, no working class, inhabited by a spectacular percentage of priests, armed forces, employees, doorkeepers, cab-drivers, strollers, journalists, poetasters, chatterboxes, certainly the city in the world where the ratio between consumers and producers was most paradoxical and where democracy and socialism had least social and economic background, seemed perfectly fitted for a reactionary coup d'état. They, the Blacks, already thought that the events of the radiant May 1915 had been a sketchy anticipation of the black revolution they now had definitely in mind. Indeed, the Reds, in May 1915, had swarmed in the squares and theatres, which they had filled with their screams of war for justice and freedom, but the positive result of the combined efforts of Reds and Blacks had been, according to the latter, an overthrow of the constitution, with the Parliamentary majority supporting neutralism knocked down and the Government virtually seized by insurrectional forces from below. Later on, in 1917, a general, Giardino, had toyed not so innocently with the idea of heading the armed patrol which should have arrested Orlando and put in the place of the liberal government a military dictatorship. Of candidates for the dictatorship there was no scarcity: from d'Annunzio to a certain number of generals and admirals, and from these to the Duke of Aosta, the cousin of the king, a tall and silly old man who had happened to be, during the war, the chief of an "invincible army" and to have married long be-



fore a lady from the French dynasty of pretenders, H  l  ne de France, extolled by d'Annunzio in *terza rima* and acquainted with some pages of Maurras and Daudet and other such camelots and mystics. Regardless of who might be the leader, it seemed fairly easy to stage a revolution in Rome, scene of past and future glory, storming the hotel where Nitti lived, near the lovely fountain called the Triton, and capturing the Premier, thereafter to wage war against Yugoslavia and the world—at last the real Italian war after three years or four of an unsatisfactory prelude. All the nations, victors and defeated alike, lay flat on their backs, unspeakably exhausted. Only Italy, if Italy was those Italians, sizzled with the itch of at last starting that pretty sword dance.

But Nitti for the time being strengthened the police. Destiny hatched somewhere else.

It hatched somewhere north-east, not very far from Padua, the quiet city near Venice where the Generalissimo and the General Staff had lodged during the latter period of the war. But none of the big people took the lead. It was a simple major of the grenadiers, though with remarkable connexions among the nobility of the city, who conceived the plan of an expedition on Fiume. His name was Rejna.

He approached d'Annunzio and presented him with the plan. The poet, unemployed and eager, grasped it. He marched on Fiume September 12, 1919, with a band of aspirant heroes and runaway criminals, of candid enthusiasts and penniless adventurers.

But not even the heroes had any heroism to perform.

The territories of the Treaty of London had been and were, since the armistice, legally and factually occupied by the Italian troops. Fiume, which according to the same treaty should have been given to Croatia and had become instead an apple of contention between Italy and Yugoslavia, was provisorily under the protection of inter-Allied forces, a no-man's-land or, pending definition of the contest, a common dominion of the Peace Conference.

But the Allies did not want to fire their guns against the Italians. Thus the daring of d'Annunzio was rather safe and his challenge to the world inexpensive.

As for the Italians, they sent a general with troops to stop d'Annunzio. The general's name was Pittaluga.

Fifty-nine years earlier, at the close of the Risorgimento, there had been a moment of suspense in Italy when King Victor Emmanuel, at the head of the regular troops, went to meet, near Naples, Garibaldi, who meanwhile at the head of his volunteers had conquered or delivered all the kingdom of Naples and Sicily. But the two men saluted each other very courteously, each pulling the bridle of his horse, and Garibaldi, the knight errant, shortly after withdrew, leaving all the territory and power to the king. D'Annunzio had sung the event in the opening line of his song of Garibaldi, with more than a grain of contempt toward the legitimate sire: "He gave the kingdom to the latecomer King."

Now Pittaluga and d'Annunzio on the threshold of Fiume repeated, to be sure on a smaller scale, the scene which, long before d'Annunzio's poem, had been made famous in thousands of oleographs. There were variants. Neither had conquered anything. And it was the regular who gave the miniature kingdom to the volunteer. Their encounter was of words and d'Annunzio had a larger supply of that ammunition. His tenor voice conquered the general, who fell patriotically crying upon the conqueror's breast and therewith surrendered the city.

D'Annunzio was the master and Signore of Fiume, a community of about fifty thousand, for over fifteen months, until the end of 1920.

Technically, what he had done was no novelty at all if compared to the very numerous coups d'état and pronunciamientos, especially those in Mexico and Central America. It was a novelty in Italy, where the army had been throughout faithful to its oath of allegiance, and where the initiative, to put it mildly, of those officers and soldiers who left their ranks to join the personal fortunes of an equally rebellious leader brought into effectiveness an

element of anarchism which so far had constantly been controlled. They pretended to fight the ambitions of the Yugoslavs, a semi-barbaric Balkanic horde as they judged them; in fact they spread in the theretofore refractory soil of Central Europe the seeds of Balkanization.

They gave a Garibaldian varnish to the adventure, the substantial character of which was quite different. Garibaldi had taken the risks on himself and his followers, in most cases trying to go hand in hand with the regular government in spite of all reciprocal grudges, submitting his last decision to its will and in all cases keeping in mind the interests of his national community and of the universe of man. On the contrary, even the best and most candid among d'Annunzio's men-of-arms were driven by sacred egoism or selfish nationalism and hatred; the risks were slight and the personal ambitions enormous. Not Garibaldi but Claudio Cantelmo, the self-seeking hero of *The Virgins of the Rocks*, had led the march. This was, finally, the most striking feature in all the affair: that a poet had done a deed: not to fight and die, almost in the ranks as Byron and other poets who had embraced a cause, but to conquer and seize and to become himself a cause. This had never happened before. For the first time a craftsman of words became a shaper of deeds, imagination sat at the helm; the dream of an extreme Romanticism, mingling poetical inspiration with actual life, had come true.

Astuteness—undoubtedly, a kind of brilliancy—rather than real force lay behind the deed. D'Annunzio and his advisers had not at all miscalculated the reactions. Neither did the Allies strike at Fiume, a neuralgic point in a sickly Europe, nor did Nitti dare.

D'Annunzio, a tyrant or despot in the classical meaning of the word, or a condottiere of the Renaissance, developed quickly all the unforeseen possibilities of his regime.

In spite of the mixed origins, something unprecedented was born. It was an autocratic oratorical republic, startlingly new.

Carducci, the singer of the purest memories of Italy, had celebrated in one of his short poems the virtue and modest glory of

a tiny rural commune in the north-eastern mountains, in the Middle Ages. There the assemblies were held outdoors; the consul presided over them, promulgating the laws, dividing the lands and pastures, prompting the shepherd citizens to become warriors if need be, in the just defensive war, whenever "the Hun or the Slav" should happen to menace their innocent liberty. "In the name of Christ and Mary—I order and will that this among the people be.—*Raising their hands the people said: Yes.*" There seemed to be no opposition at all; the rural commune was totalitarian. "And the red cows on the meadow—saw the little senate pass—while the noon shone on the firs."

This delightful poem, together with a few high-school reminiscences from pages of Greek and Roman historians in which Pericles or Cæsar addressed, outdoors, the citizens or the legionaries, provided the foundation of d'Annunzio's political system, which in its turn was to be the foundation of Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes.

The people and the soldiers convened in the square beneath the palace of the government. The poet, in his over-medalled military uniform, appeared, conveniently flanked by some of the staff, on the balcony, which looked like a baldachin. There he delivered an elaborate harangue, more or less pertinently moulded according to the rhetorical rules of Græco-Roman public speaking. At the end he bolstered up as best he could his penetrating but rather effeminate voice, and asked the people for consent.

The people raised their right hands and arms, and answered: Yes.

The gesture of the raised right arm, which was to be sooner or later the Roman and, unbelievable but true, the German salute, had been picked at random from classical museums, from gestures of Græco-Roman orators and rulers, and perhaps also from the medieval romance of Carducci. In antiquity it had been occasionally an attitude of oratorical vehemence, or of command, or even of pardon. It may also have been seen, occasionally, as a salute from the distance, which happens nowadays as it always has,

whenever people at the railway station or on the pier bid farewell to departing friends. It never had been the ordinary salute in the streets of Greece and Rome, where the free citizens shook hands or affectionately clasped each other's wrist, while no doubt the slave, meeting his master, saluted with the raised right arm, almost to show that his hand was disarmed and his obedience defenceless. A salute of slaves; such indeed was the gesture of Fiume to become, sooner or later, in Italy and Germany.

D'Annunzio and the Fiumani liked it because it seemed straight and strenuous, incomparably more dignified than the humble bow of the civilian baring his forehead, and more powerful, also, than the military salute stopping at the *képi* level, midway between the hero's torso and the sky, his limit. The dash of the fully swung arm in Fiume seemed, on the contrary, to plunge right away a dagger into the throat of an invisible enemy, gladiator-like. It spread, at least symbolically, future and blood in the elastic air; and since no Hun or Slav threatened battle it incidentally was a kind of exercise. Several might have seen the equestrian monuments which represented Garibaldi sighting Palermo from the surrounding mountains and showing the golden city to a comrade as he, the red-shirted liberator, raised the right arm and promised: "Nino, tomorrow in Palermo." D'Annunzio, at the balcony or on horseback, imitating the posture, was likely to mean: "Boys, tomorrow we sail toward the world." But it is even possible that at times he would add a vague allusion to some sort of episcopal or papal benediction, which solemn gesture he much enjoyed in the all-embroiling stew of his imagination.

The crowd, surging and raising hundreds of right arms, answered, no matter what he had said: Yes. But they also often—and more often in the process of time—yelled or sang: *Eya! Eya! Alalà!*

These syllables, which were soon to become the Fascist outcry, had also been concocted by d'Annunzio, from obscure recollections of Homeric poetry with a dash of the Kaiser's hip-hip-hurrah and of the hunter's hallali and tallyho. It is more doubtful

whether or not the Wagnerian crescendo of Marinetti's ride to the stars had a share in it.

All such performances were called rites, or *sagre* (consecrations).

The military, and the militarized civilians, were heavily armed. Many of the *arditi* or storm troopers who had joined the expedition and marched on Fiume in the forty trucks stolen from the regular army, fondly loved their dagger. They would bear it, unsheathed, in their teeth, leaving their hands free for bomb-throwing or salutes or any other optionally warlike or political operation.

Black shirts and black flames on the collars of the military coats had been seen, here and there, on the front during the last period of the war. They had been worn by certain units of *arditi* (fearless) or storm troopers which had been formed to enhance audacity in the most decisive spots and events, enlisting patriotic daredevils and such others whose criminal record, not quite blank, might be whitewashed by some exceptional service in battle. Some of them had been also allowed to wear emblems of skulls and crossbones.

Black shirts and flames and handkerchiefs, and skulls and crossbones, were more abundantly visible in Fiume.

Black, which had been the colour of terroristic anarchy, became now the colour of anarchical nationalism.

The black shirts grew blacker, when occasionally laundered. They were good for all uses. In a fictitious democratic mood they recalled the workman's blouse. If warlike inspiration was at hand, they resembled the Garibaldian's shirt: which, according to the spirit of an era passed, had, however, been red.

D'Annunzio, too, cherished daggers and cold iron, as more classical and æsthetically appealing than mechanized weapons, though by no means minimizing whatever oratorical charm there might be in "the round mouth of the cannon." He too was fond of horrifying emblems. But his hands were white, and his cruelty not genuine.

Castor oil also, as a means of speedy persuasion, was first tried in Fiume: that generous, strong-smelling purge which with one stroke cleanses the opponent's bowels and brains. Its use, however, was not yet wholesale.

There were women, music, songs, and also drugs.

War, the ever coveted, remained day after day a mirage. D'Annunzio emerged on the balcony, asking: "To whom Fiume?" The crowd unanimously answered: "To us!" (*A noi!* which was to be a Fascist cry). He further asked: "Italy to whom?" The assembly chorused: "To us!" quite openly expressing the quality of their love, which was a love of possession. Then d'Annunzio would bring the rite to a close by tenderly assuring: "*Vu con mi, mi con vu*"; which in the soft Venetian dialect meant: "You with me, I with you, ever." He slept and woke, dreaming, in Nietzschean terms, of "dawns not yet born."

The little man did not exceed by much the height of five feet. But his imagination was tall.

Fiume was nothing to him; or it was everything, but only in the sense of Archimedes' "*pou sto*": Give me where I can stand, and I shall move the world.

From Fiume, a pivot of which he was the pivot, d'Annunzio planned to subvert the world.

Lenin and his unexpected conquest of Russia had impressed him, evidencing that imagination and individual will still ruled the world, and that everything was feasible. To be sure, Lenin was just a barbarian, and a half-plebeian. He, d'Annunzio, could easily be bigger and better.

As for domestic and economic policy—of which he had no knowledge beyond the experience of his large earnings and his even larger indebtedness—why not build an ideal commonwealth in which those ugly modern things, Socialism and Communism, might become things of beauty according to the tenets which he had rhymed about twenty years earlier, glorifying the workman and the peasant as glorifiers of the Beautiful Life? It was understood that only a Latin poet, not a Northern conspirator, could do

it; and he did it, on heavy luxurious paper, with precious inks and huge capital letters, drafting the Statutes of Fiume: a theoretical organization, imitating by ear the corporations and guilds, the supposed Paradise of medieval craftsmanship when everybody was an artist and a king. The Statutes of Fiume never materialized into anything real, but they were to provide the foundation for Mussolini's Corporative State, the Latin synthesis of collectivism and individualism, of Socialism and Despotism and Capitalism and Nationalism: which state, in its turn, never materialized into anything real.

As for the international and world policy, Fiume was the advance post or citadel of the future, which pointed both toward Rome and toward the Orient.

D'Annunzio constantly kept in mind the march on Rome. This, and not the march on Fiume, was to be the fourteenth victory. There were no Italians left now; but only d'Annunzians and Nittians. D'Annunzio felt sure, sooner or later, to crack between thumb and forefinger the little, despicable man who usurped Rome and whom he meanwhile held under a barrage of excremental outrages.

On the other hand, because the war had been fought altogether in territories neighbouring Venice and speaking Venetian dialects, the Roman complex of the Italian intellectual élite had suppurated, to begin with, into a kind of Venetian tumour. It seemed necessary, and therefore possible, to rebuild the Venetian Empire, enlarging it into an Empire of the Orient, heir to Byzantium, whence to proceed toward further goals.

D'Annunzio was stirred by what already was happening in Asia Minor under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, against the Sultanate of Constantinople and the Western Powers. Kemal—he too an insurgent against the treaties of peace—seemed to him a prospective confederate, and most probably was an inspiration to him. Now and then the poet schemed, in half-secrecy, to become a prophet in the Moslem world and together with it to dispose of the Balkan states and to bring the Western Powers to their knees.



He felt, at the same time, like Dante the exile, Garibaldi the liberator, Cesare Borgia building a state out of nothing, and Julius Cæsar crossing the Rubicon.

Meanwhile in Italy the economic consequences of the war were impinging on the neurasthenically split soul of the nation. Those economic consequences, in comparison with the resources and losses of the country, were no worse than anywhere else. In Italy as well as in every other victor country there were the difficulties of demobilizing huge masses of men who had been used to receiving their food from the state, and amidst dangers and toils had at least enjoyed a blessed carelessness in matters of household and finances. There were the difficulties of readjusting the machinery of the war industry to ordinary conditions: hence the burning patriotism of a few ammunition makers and profiteers, who quite easily smuggled money and supplies to Fiume. There were the mutilated, the sick, the disabled, an innumerable army of victims scratching with impatient fingers at the exhausted budget of the state. There were the devaluation of the currency, the shamelessness of the upstart plutocrats, and the despair of the ruined. There were strikes, tumults, noisy and dusty Sundays, jammed trains, not at all running on time, rolling-stock devastated by the overwork of wartime and not yet repaired or renewed, the civil service partially disorganized under an unexpected burden, the strife of individuals and parties, the sprouting of miraculous political and economic programmes out of that sodden soil, like mushrooms not seldom poisonous.

To such troubles, which were common in greater or lesser degree to other countries, must be added the troubles which were particularly Italian, as a consequence of the particularly Italian poverty. The swelling of the public debt and the gaps in the budget seemed—and were—more dangerous than in England or France; the menace of unemployment loomed or was already actual. The undernourishment that had racked the body and soul of the nation during the latter period of the war was still a present ghost; for many months after the armistice certain supplies

were still delivered only upon presentation of food cards; and the shortage of fuel for two consecutive winters rendered irritable the employee in the office, and gloomy the family in the drawing room, where even wealthy bourgeois sat under old rugs and near prehistoric warming pans which they had brought down from some forgotten corner of the attic.

But these sufferings and trials might have been coped with, as they were elsewhere, had not the tragic soul of the nation cherished them. Reds and Blacks were now in agreement, the former elated by the feeling of defeat which the latter had so successfully spread, the extreme Socialists thriving on the conviction that the war which they had opposed had been a failure and wanting therefore a revolution, the Nationalists proclaiming the peace a failure and therefore wanting further war. The people capable of reasoning and disinterested thinking seemed to be a small minority, silenced between the clamours of the two extremes. The *Corriere della Sera*, the only daily trying to inculcate a middle course, was morally marooned in its building in the centre of Milan, where its writers hardly realized that only a handful of people, in the hundreds of thousands who habitually and coldly bought and read the paper, accepted their thought.

Under the strain of the circumstances Nitti was compelled to resign, in June 1920, and the succession was difficult. At last Giolitti, the old man, was called back. He had not wanted the Italian war and, as the leader of neutralism, had been insulted and menaced, called a traitor to the fatherland. Out of his more or less voluntary confinement and silence he came, and sat again, incredibly, at the helm. The years and the trials had somehow blunted the point of his wit; a benevolent gravity was now in his accent, as if he paternally said: "I warned you boys to avoid that war. You did not listen. Now I'll try to make it up for you." The logic of emotions suggested the thought that the return of Giolitti implied a confession, another one, of national defeat.

But the old man, who had been unable to understand the huge historical developments of 1914 and 1915, was adequate, or at

least seemed to be the most adequate of all, to ordinary and even extraordinary problems of domestic administration and mass psychology. He had an honest belief in the state and the nation above the factions, and his presence at the head of the government spread a transitory feeling of steadfastness, as when a few barrels of oil are discharged around a boat on a stormy sea.

The Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Giolitti's Cabinet was Carlo Sforza, a professional diplomat, who had spent part of the wartime at the Balkan front and part in civil service, especially as minister of Italy to the Serbian Government. He was still unknown to the many, and his particular attitude had made him so far remarkable only in the small groups that were acquainted with the events behind the scenes. He had been born in Northern Tuscany, as the son of a nobleman—not very wealthy—who had devoted all his leisure to studies in Italian history and whose knowledge of the Risorgimento was first-hand and earnest. The suggestions from the father's library had had an influence on young Sforza's mind; and the conservative liberalism of the—not very big—landowner brought him near to the system of Cavour, which he combined, however, with certain elements of Mazzini's doctrine. With this truly exceptional preparation he tried to understand the problems of the World War; his interpretation was orthodoxly, although with no rhetorical emphasis, the one that might have been given by the leaders and poets of the Risorgimento; quite early he realized the dangers and the stupidity of the impending Italo-Yugoslav strife, and made every effort to avert it. Once, in 1917, he came to Rome with Pašić, the Serbian minister and almost dictator, who wanted the fairest possible understanding with Italy and had proposals of his own, which Sforza judged commendable. Sonnino received both courteously, listened attentively to Pašić, then bade them farewell with the same courtesy as in his welcome, and without having otherwise broken the stoniness of his silence.

That man, Sforza, ought to have been the man of Italy and a man of Europe, in Paris, supporting and advising Wilson. But it

was already a great miracle—probably owing to the tactfulness of his official behaviour and to the nice smile that smoothed the strength of his convictions—that he had not been dismissed from office and that his services were still available. His moment came with an unfortunate delay, when the world-wide opportunities of Paris and Versailles were already gone; but the Italo-Yugoslav issue, a crux of the future, was still open, and there he did what should have been done.

The Treaty of Rapallo between Italy and Yugoslavia was signed in November 1920. Territorially, Italy was acknowledged the possessor of all the north-eastern region as far as the ridge of the Alps and even beyond the traditional boundaries of the peninsula as they had been described by Dante. Dalmatia, or more exactly the district of Sebenico, went to Yugoslavia; but Zara, the only Italian community of Dalmatia, together with some islands of Slavic population, remained to Italy. As for Fiume, it was to become a free city, in whose administration and protection Italy as well as Yugoslavia was interested, but under such provisions as made a further agreement and peaceful partition easily foreseen.

But already in the treaty of 1920 Italy, after having a year earlier, in the peace with Austria, reached the Northern Alpine border as far as the Brennerpass, had a natural boundary all around the peninsula the perfection of which was unmatched in all other continental states. She had achieved the unity of all the Italian-speaking races to a degree of completeness that was unknown to France and to all the older nations except England. Yielding to military and geographical dogmas which from a different standpoint might have been considered as superstitions, she included within her borders a larger number of aliens, Germans and Slavs, than was desirable. But the ethnographic map of Europe is so fractured that an irreprehensible distribution of the populations according to national language and feeling is a sheer impossibility, and the privileges granted to Italy in contradiction of a punctilious principle of nationality were no less justifiable than those allowed to France in Alsace, and far less objectionable

than what had happened in the treaties about Central and Eastern Europe. It could also legitimately be expected at that time that Italy, the country of Mazzini and Garibaldi, would meet with wisdom and magnanimity the problem of ruling some hundreds of thousands of new citizens separated from the national communities to which they would have wished to belong.

However, the highest value of the treaty with the Yugoslavs was not in its territorial and economic clauses, but in the spirit of friendship that inspired the negotiations and the document. This was the first and only treaty of peace after the war freely agreed upon by the contracting parties; the others had been treaties of war imposed by the winner upon the vanquished. The Italian and Yugoslav governments, in behalf of the best-thinking minorities in the two countries, seemed to believe in a future of peace and collaboration; they thought and acted in terms of Europe; the spirit of the Risorgimento was alive again; and the event, a model of what should have happened everywhere in Europe and of what perhaps might still happen in the future, was celebrated in a memorial stone, which cold Fascist ire a few years later was to break to pieces.

The Blacks and d'Annunzio, the sire of Fiume, did not accept the Treaty of Rapallo. Treachery was their usual deadly monotonous word. They schemed to spread military revolt in the troops which since the armistice had occupied the section of Dalmatia promised by the Treaty of London, and thus to flout the clauses of the new treaty requiring the evacuation of Sebenico and the adjacent territory. Millo, an admiral who during the Libyan war had almost forced the Dardanelles, almost joined d'Annunzio with the fleet which he almost stole from the state; an autographic letter by the king, written under the insistent suggestion of Sforza and reminding Millo of his oath of allegiance, prevented the deed at the eleventh hour.

D'Annunzio himself swore with the most powerful impact of his biblical eloquence that he never would abandon the holy city (or city of holocaust as he ordinarily called it) and that the cow-

ardly henchmen of Giolitti and Sforza should have to tread on his bleeding corpse before violating Fiume. Something dreadful was impending: fratricidal slaughter, and the death of a great hero and poet, whose sacrifice would become the signal for civil warfare and for a national, perhaps an international, catastrophe.

The forces of the Italian Government appeared before Fiume shortly before Christmas. A shell exploded on the façade of the Fiume government building, not far from d'Annunzio's balcony.

It is easy to say that the poet was too much of a poet to become a real Cæsar; it would probably be mean to investigate the supposed crisis of his personal courage. Much fairer is it to grant that when confronted with the necessity of irretrievable decisions, he loathed bloodshed, and his delicate artist's hands withheld the gesture.

There was, in spite of his perplexity, some killing: a blood-bespattered Christmas. Then the poet declared that "Italy was not worth dying for." Silently, and undisturbed, he marched on his Saint Helena: a villa among olive trees and laurels on the western slope of the lake of Garda.

Only die-hard optimists could believe that the end of the adventure might bring about the recovery of Italy. Whatever Giolitti and Sforza had been able to do, it was now too late. Military or surgical operations, and even masterful international treaties, are of little avail when the mind of the nation is crazed.

Reds and Blacks went on tearing the national mind after the fall of Fiume as they had done before.

But no great leader headed the Reds. And the Blacks had lost theirs since d'Annunzio had receded to his self-chosen confinement.

At last the opportunity lay open to Mussolini. He could ride the foam.

## *Mussolini*

THE present rationalizes the past.

Italy was, at least virtually, a battlefield of Reds and Blacks, the intermediate shades vanishing more and more between the extremes.

Had there been an oracle, had it been asked: "Who will master Italy?" the oracle would have answered: "The one who is at the same time a Red and a Black."

But there was no oracle, and Mussolini himself, the Red-Black, did not know.

During the adventure in Fiume he had sided openly with d'Annunzio, going so far as to affirm, repeatedly, that the real government of Italy was in Fiume and not in Rome. D'Annunzio had relied on him, supposing that at a given moment a nationalist revolution, led by his Roman friends and Mussolini, would have flared up, subverting the legitimate government and presenting him with supreme power and the fourteenth victory.

But Mussolini did not deem the time ripe. Moreover, he did not like to play second violin, which destiny would have befallen him, a second-rate journalist and politician with a modest war record, had the lead of events been taken by an illustrious poet and hero.

Promises were impetuously given and cleverly withdrawn. Money was also collected by Mussolini on behalf of d'Annunzio, which money, under one pretext or another, was withheld. Although silently pondering, Mussolini kept listening with one ear to the disinterested suggestions that were whispered to him by some industrialists and plutocrats. "You have," they said, "a great

mission in domestic politics. Why should you want to entangle yourself in an unfortunate international affair?"

Perhaps when d'Annunzio collapsed he remembered again the old lesson of how little avail are poets and poets' words when the moment for real action strikes. Not only had d'Annunzio's deeds not been up to the gigantic size of his words, but since the very beginning there had been a whimsical or literary distortion in his method. What would have happened if Lenin, instead of aiming directly at St. Petersburg, the heart and brain of Russia, had started by establishing a Soviet republic in the Crimea or the Caucasus? Nothing would have happened. But this precisely is what d'Annunzio had tried to do: to conquer Milan and Rome from Fiume, and following the line of least resistance and danger, to become the master of the national body by just taking hold of its remotest lock of hair. Not even the lock of hair had remained in his hand.

It is mere guesswork to wonder whether or not Mussolini had read the biography of Cola di Rienzo written by d'Annunzio a few years before the war: a most startling self-prophecy and self-caricature. There were affinities between the scribe and the poet, as well as between the catastrophes of both. In spite of the contempt which the poet had heaped on his forerunner, Cola's tragic farce against the setting of medieval Rome and in the horrifying end of the protagonist had been less mediocre than its belated repetition in Fiume. There were, undoubtedly, also in the case of d'Annunzio the tragic elements of pity and terror; the sadness of a self-seeking ambition crumbling almost silently upon itself might have stirred a sensitive heart. But it would be fanciful to ascribe that kind of meditation to Mussolini, at the close of the fateful year 1920.

His problem was as it had always been, the problem of his personality and of its fulfilment.

He was now in the thirty-eighth year of his age.

His past had no secret for himself, and lies open to any historian or biographer.



But there are today three methods of thinking about history, each seemingly ignoring the others. The professional historian, under the ponderous influence of late romantic and especially German theory, thinks in terms of mass movements and economic struggles; the individual characters are to him puppets whose strings are pulled by anonymous hands. The biographers—hundreds of them have sprouted in the last twenty years—imitate, although mostly not cognizant of it, the style of Plutarch or Cornelius Nepos: the individual is everything to them and the environment is a neutral background, like a grey curtain against which the chosen protagonist or soloist performs his feat. Freud, or Jung, often takes in the biographies the place which in histories belonged to Hegel or Marx: sex, emotion, libido, repression, do the work which elsewhere is done by the dialectics of ideas or by class warfare. The reader acquainted with both sorts of books should be at a loss. Perhaps he finds an appeasement of his mind when reading a third sort of books, namely novels. The novelist, if he is a good one, knows how to counterweigh determinism with freedom, environment with personality, the economic struggle with the other urges of flesh and soul. No modern historian has approached the completeness of perspective which we find in Balzac or Tolstoi, and the mysterious sentence of Aristotle, according to whom fiction is more philosophical—nay, we may add, more historical—than history itself, seems in the light of this comparison a statement of common sense.

This third method, the perspective of the good novelist, is the one that ought to be applied to Mussolini, if we want to understand this unexpected protagonist of contemporary history.

To be sure, there is the environment: geography, chronology, genealogy, sociology.

He was born in a village in Romagna. This region, comprising the plains and hills between Bologna and Ravenna, belongs geographically to the Po valley and Northern Italy, but its history was constantly connected with Central Italy. The temper of its populace and lords in the Middle Ages was adequately described

by Dante. "Thy Romagna," he reports to a damned soul, "is not nor ever was without war in the hearts of her tyrants"; of one of her lords he says that he changes political party "as summer turns to winter"; of one of her cities, that "she lives between the lots of freemen and of slaves."

Later the whole region came under the Papal rule, and thus it remained until the Risorgimento. In the centuries of the decadence it developed a cynical Catholicism of its own, an external conformism delighting in a superior sneer; priests and prelates were seen, and not rarely deserved to be seen, with the eyes of a Boccaccio or Rabelais. The spirit of Romagna became utterly baroque; and such was, together with its figurative and decorative arts, the natural complexion of its people: often fat, and ordinarily redundant in gesticulation and voice. They spoke, and speak, a strange dialect, lush and harsh at once, with broad vowels and hissing consonants: which the other Italians enjoy even when, as usually happens, they do not understand it. The peculiarities of its phonetics seem indelible. Mussolini himself, although the author of Fascism, could never succeed in correctly speaking the word, which he pronounces as if it were *Fassismo*.

There is a sensuous spell in the coloured sky and in the savoury earth, brocaded with orchards and vineyards, plumed with rustling rows of poplar trees. Dante, the ever-frowning, could remember with a chivalric and almost smiling regret, "the knights and ladies, toils and revelries,—which love and courtesy made dear to us," in the good old time of Romagna. But this tradition of epicurean and yet passionate splendour never totally perished. She was a Romagnola, the Francesca da Rimini who while reading a French novel could not help falling, for all eternity, into the arms of her handsome brother-in-law; he was a Romagnolo, the cultured tyrant who built in Rimini a marvellous and allegedly Christian temple, rather to honour his concubine than the saints of Paradise. Even today voluptuousness, laughter, and good cheer are well at home in the lordly mansions of city and countryside; and the food of Romagna, elaborate and sauced, is re-

nowned all over Italy. The peasants too, and the fishermen, on the beach of the mellow green Adriatic or in sight of their fancifully painted sails crowding the canals, gladly enjoy, when they can afford it, a hearty meal with copious drink; or if their purses are empty and their bellies flabby, they curse. Christian meekness is not the decisive component in the blood of Romagna, or "*sangue romagnolo*" as the Italians say.

This expression hints at the most obdurate complex of paganism that can be found in Europe. Generosity and hospitality are primitive, violence is sudden, sin is remorseless, or no sin at all. A remarkable percentage is contributed by Romagna to prostitution, and those priestesses of Venus, initiated in Bologna or Imola, are often preferred by the devotees of such temples in the country at large. Crime, especially passional and political, is widespread; and in not so olden times brigandage celebrated there some of its most glamorous triumphs. Famous above all others in the nineteenth century was a highway hero, whose surname sounded strangely, "the courteous passer." Pascoli, a poet of Romagna—indeed, very different from the large majority of his countrymen; indeed, very mild and suave—could sing the praise of his native region, of "sunny, sweet Romagna," adding, helter-skelter, that the said sweet land had been ruled by medieval tyrants such as Guidis and Malatestas and by the Courteous Passer, "king of the road and king of the wood." On the other hand, that same vehement temper could flare up in ardours of a higher sort, and give rise to political riots if not to revolutions; to daring conspiracies if not to thorough-going renovations; and Mazzinianism and Republicanism counted in Romagna a large affiliation. But on the whole the country was politically and socially backward: to some extent a relic of the Middle Ages, a crystallization of those permanent and meaningless strifes among "those that one wall and one fosse shut in." Immediately after the construction of the new kingdom of Italy, Romagna became the promised land of all republican hotheads: a phenomenon of which no rational or sociological explanation is available. Later on Socialism came; and although

Romagna was almost entirely deprived of industrialism and capitalism in the modern sense, very many Romagnoli became Socialists, and fought valiantly—not at all against the Government or the capitalists, but against the Republicans in their communes. Both parties, Socialists and Republicans, were unaware of the fact that they were just playing the old game of Guelphs and Ghibellines, with changed names; Italy and Europe were farther from their imagination than Papacy and Empire had been from the imagination of the medieval partisans. Such a state of things had no parallel in any other region; no island ever was more insular than Romagna.

This was the country where Mussolini was born, in July 1883, at Predappio near Forli. He did not see any considerable change during his childhood and adolescence, except perhaps the peasants and workers, men and women, turning cyclists and swarming with brawls and laughter on the dusty roads at sunset. The taverns and cafés, the former far more numerous than the latter, were as they had always been: teeming with drinkers, smokers, card-players, and political orators, whose eloquence, richly spiced with surprisingly picturesque oaths, rashly solved the problems of the day. Their social and scientific background was comfortably thin. They remembered Mazzini and Garibaldi; they did not like any longer the former Mazzinian Carducci, who was to some extent a glory of Romagna since he taught in Bologna, but who had unpardonably gone royalist. A few of them had occasionally approached Alfredo Oriani, the philosopher and novelist, the journalist and historian, half-genius, half-caricature, who, after having unsuccessfully tried many paths of glory, retired to his native Romagna, there to mix Hegelianism and Republicanism, egotism and religion, psalm and grudge, in a flashing chaos where any kind of rebellious appeal, from anarchism to obscurantism, had its chance of thundering: often magnificently solitary in his hermitage like Moses talking to God alone, then again roaming on a bicycle among the poplar trees uphill, or pouring from the rather Michelangelesque mask in which he had shaped his face a stream

of eloquence into a group of adventitious disciples around a café table, who did not understand what he said much more than he did while he said it.

However, the best informed among the youth, even if they had not met Oriani, had heard about the *Communist Manifesto*. They could also spell, although in French orthography, the names of Kropotkine and Bakounine.

In such a time and society Benito Mussolini spent his childhood and adolescence. He belonged among the have-nots. His father was a blacksmith, his mother a schoolteacher.

The method of searching for the origins of his character in his early experiences, as conditioned solely by the economic environment, has not given thus far satisfactory results. It is too easy to explain everything by poverty and revolt against poverty.

The obvious motivations for Mussolini's career, "except poverty, are lacking." This is John Gunther's opinion and that of many others. "His father, a revolutionary socialist, was the anarchist of the village square, yes; but no tragedy occurred in Mussolini's life to compare with the execution of Lenin's older brother, or Pilsudski's. . . . Kemal Ataturk's mother was tortured by the Greeks; and thus, years later, the Turkish dictator drove the Greeks into the sea; in Mussolini's life there is no such dramatic and direct impulse to redemption.

"Nor can one easily uncover any extraordinary personal accidents without which the Duce might have lived and died a blacksmith's boy in Forli. It is quite possible, as Bertrand Russell has pointed out, that the revolution in Russia might never have occurred had not a German general permitted Lenin to travel across Germany in a sealed train. It is quite probable that Soviet Russia would have never had a Five Year Plan had not Trotsky succumbed to a fit of pique and refused to attend Lenin's funeral. . . . Such personal accidents, which play a large part in history, are not prominent in Mussolini's life." <sup>1</sup>

The only positive fact is that "he grew up in the most crushing

<sup>1</sup> John Gunther, *Inside Europe*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1936.

poverty. He never tasted coffee until he was twenty. He slept on a bundle of hay instead of a mattress, and the bedroom in his birthplace, which has been made a museum, preserves this symbol of extreme indigence."

Even this only positive fact vanishes as soon as it is more carefully considered. There was no crushing poverty and starvation in a family not so numerous—of children there were only three—where the father was an independent worker and the mother a teacher with a regular if modest salary. A year after the death of his brother Arnaldo, that is, at the end of 1932, Benito Mussolini wrote a memorial book, full of highly sentimentalized reminiscences of childhood and adolescence. His testimony should be deemed credible, and does not sound altogether tragic. True, the ordinary diet was not copious, but this was and is the rule in the overwhelming majority of Italian families; and besides, there were jolly Sundays, with celebrations, dances, horse races, and heavy dinners, right in the style of Romagna. Other sources disclose that their father, among other business and work, was the part-owner of a *trattoria* or tavern. "The streets"—thus wrote Benito—"were full of the smell of food that came from the many outdoor, or improvised, *trattorie*. . . . At noon we gathered around the table, abundantly provided with dishes and wine."

True also, the mattress on which the two boys slept was no beauty mattress stuffed with soft wool; it was a paillasse of dried maize leaves, but there is no reason to believe that it was so thoroughly uncomfortable, and it was not at all the bundle of hay which Gunther, or his informant, fancies. They had a large iron bed, built by their father the blacksmith: a feature, not unpleasant, of olden Italian craftsmanship. The apartment consisted of two rooms "at the second floor of Palace Varano, and to enter it one had to pass through the third room, which was the school": a detail sufficient in itself to assure us of the decency of the apartment. "Near our bed there was a cupboard of reddish wood that contained our suits"—incidentally, the tailor who made their Sunday suits worked in their own home—"in front, there was a bookcase,

full of old books and periodicals." There Arnaldo and Benito read their first poems; there also Benito chanced one day upon the love letters of his father to his mother. He read a few of them. A window faced the bed, and from the window they contemplated an inspiring view, "with the hills and the moon rising behind Fior-dinano." At the other side of the bed they had the cupboard for the bread, and the fireplace, seldom burning. In the second room slept father, mother, and the little sister. The furniture consisted of a chest of drawers and of a large cupboard in white wood, "where, at the top, showed nine rolls of linen, of which my mother was particularly proud and jealous." In the middle of the room Benito studied at his table. Among his other books he mentions Hugo's *Les Misérables* and the *Ethics* of Ardigò: an unfrocked priest who had become the leader of positivistic philosophy and who was at once the Herbert Spencer and the Ernest Renan of Italy.

This is poverty, undoubtedly, but no misery or shame. The particular detail about the seldom burning fireplace is not so distressing if one has in mind the temperate climate. The boys, as the survivor reports, enjoyed the snowfalls. This happened—and would not easily happen, by a dead fireplace, in Canada or Siberia—just because snowfalls were rather exceptional. That they had no coffee may be accurate, but most probably they did not like it; and the Mussolinis had even rented, with a nine-year lease, a vineyard (with some fig trees) which produced nearly two thousand pounds of grapes. A Tuscan poet of the seventeenth century had written a spirited dithyramb in praise of Bacchus and wine, in which he also expressed his jocular abhorrence for the black modern potion. "I would rather drink a poison than a glass of bitter, dire coffee." The plebs and the lower middle classes of Romagna, a couple of centuries later, had hardly reached the age of coffee. If a dangerous anarchist came out of the American Middle West, it would not be sensible to explain his career by the fact that in his adolescence he had no wine or figs, but just whisky and apples (plus coffee).

This environment gave something to Mussolini—he always was hypersensitive to external suggestions—but rather in other directions than the economic. His father—who seems to have been a sturdy fellow, delighting in wine and women—taught him the lesson of energy and obstreperous words, to which the rhythm of his hammering in a setting of fire and iron was an appropriate accompaniment. It is possible, as often surmised, that a quantum of Œdipus-complex, not amounting to a great deal, developed in the boy Mussolini, with the desire of growing better or stronger than the father. There is no doubt that the blacksmith was restless and ambitious. Many parents at that time used to accoutre their offspring with operatic, or classical, or patriotic, or otherwise abnormal names, thus giving vent to their own inclinations and repressed desires. While it is irrelevant to inquire why the father Mussolini called his little girl by the German romantic name Edvige, it is well known that the second of his boys was called Arnaldo after the famous medieval heretic and rebel Arnaldo da Brescia, who was burned at the stake. The new Arnaldo studied the peaceful science of practical agriculture, in which he graduated, later to be a teacher of that calm science. He became a fat, benevolent, and oftentimes sincerely good-hearted fellow; a lover of his children, a sentimentalist, even, later on, a devout Catholic, indulging by preference in minor sins, like gluttony. Until his death, which was natural, he served loyally and admiringly his elder brother, occasionally trying to moderate the latter's temper, in an attitude, both physical and psychic, which could vaguely remind one of Sancho.

As for Benito, the Spanish name—corresponding to the Italian Benedetto—had been given to him in honour of the Mexican Indian insurgent Benito Juárez, who had caused the Emperor Maximilian to be shot. The new Benito tried as long as he could to be an unyielding enemy of kings and emperors; then he changed his mind and wanted to be an emperor himself.

It is presumable, quite obviously, that he learned something also from his mother: especially the domineering spirit of the



schoolteacher. He could listen to her as she, in the adjacent classroom, having written a word on the blackboard, got all the children to spell it rhythmically in chorus. This was his first lesson in unanimity. He also, when his time came, graduated as a schoolteacher, and had for a short time an experience of that profession: which means for so many men and women a daily opportunity for improvement in human benevolence and charity. He found nothing in his profession which he had not already found and liked in his own blood: the spirit of command and the hatred of contradiction. Indeed, all Italy today, a nation of over forty millions, is one classroom, where all, from the king and the university professors to the simple peasants, have been thrown back, in short pants, to the elementary school, there to spell in chorus the word that the black master has written on the blackboard. Little school-children, when restless, may be physically chastised; grown-ups may too.

As far as his relations with the environment are concerned, Mussolini took from parentage and Romagna a trend toward violence in words and occasionally in deeds, and a self-enjoyment in intellectual rambling. But not everybody in his family and region was like him; and men do not grow like ears of corn in a field.

He breathed from the atmosphere the elements that were suitable to his personality. Later on it proved that the quality of this personality was in harmony with the atmosphere of his age.

The positive substance of his personality was energy and desire, not indeed in Napoleonic proportions, but far above the average. The negative feature was a lack of continuity and purpose, with a readiness to discouragement and a distaste for steady directions.

Only love, any kind of love, might have made up the contrast and developed his energy into a positive service. But love, or charity, is a gift from on high, which was not bestowed on him and which he did not try to conquer by means of that innocent "violence" that is suggested in the Gospel.

The clever, too clever games which he inserted in the memorial

book about his brother Arnaldo do not beguile a reader. There, imitating the suave poets of which his sunny and bloody Romagna had borne a score, and echoing also the easy-going benevolence of his dead brother, he crowned the last chapter with a song, in sobbing prose, to "goodness" and "forgiveness." "To remain good," he wrote, "all through one's life: that is what gives the measure of the greatness of a soul. . . . Who is good asks never whether it is worth while. He thinks that it is always worth while. To help an unfortunate, even though undeserving; to dry a tear, even if impure; to give relief to privation, hope to sadness, consolation to death; that weaves the woof of sympathy, with threads invisible but powerful which bind the spirits and make them better." "The Fascist regime," states the following page, "through Arnaldo's work *humanized itself* [*italics his*]. Political calculation gave place to the impulses of the heart. . . . Forgiveness is one of the requisites of goodness; and Arnaldo pardoned always, even those, especially those, who had hurt him."

Was not the writer of these words very different from the man who, shortly before, had said to Emil Ludwig: "I am implacable"? Had not grace touched his heart? It sounded like the confession of a convert.

But he was then at the peak of his power, with all the means in his hand to be "good" and "forgiving" to his heart's content. Many political opponents were languishing in prison or confinement or exile. He did not pardon them. He honoured the memory of his brother with a wreath of false words, thus giving evidence that not even his love for the dead was genuine.

Love had not been bestowed on him, and he had not cared for it. Hence the development of his personality happened merely in the direction of revenge and envy, and he could never master his intelligence, leading it in the search for the good and the true.

In Ludwig's *Talks with Mussolini*<sup>1</sup> there is a dramatic reminiscence of the latter's childhood.

<sup>1</sup> Emil Ludwig, *Talks with Mussolini*, Boston, Little Brown & Company, 1933.

"In your childhood," said Ludwig, "your pride certainly had to stand hard trials."

"Tremendous," said Mussolini, lowering his voice. "My mother asked for a subsidy for me in the boarding school, and she did not get it. At table we boys sat in three sections. I had always to sit at the bottom, eating with the poorest. Maybe I might have been able to forget the ants in the bread of the third class. But that we children were divided into classes, that burns still in my soul."

"As a reward," Ludwig amicably remarked, "such sorrows became fruitful in you."

"Very much so!" Mussolini vivaciously exclaimed. "Such unbearable and undeserved humiliations make a man a revolutionary."

If the story is accurate there is no doubt that it is distressing. Other children may have overcome such and worse humiliations, and grown up moderate and kindly. One can, however, grant that an exceptionally sensitive and responsive child may draw from a feeling of degradation the impulse to revolt. One could even go so far as to suppose that the ants—which probably in some dry days, and in a very careless boarding school, walked also in the bread of the first class—and especially the distribution into classes, might have had in Mussolini's career the place which is granted in other biographies to the execution of Lenin's brother or to the torture of Kemal's mother.

The only flaw in all the story and in its author's comments is that Mussolini did not become a revolutionary. He did not really want, as a protest against the castes of that dining room, a classless society in which his companions and he could enjoy equal rights. His real desire was to pass to the first class or to be the first, he alone, altogether. His talks with Ludwig took place in 1932. At that time his bread had certainly no ants; but many Italians, and not the worst of them, ate their bread with the tears of separation or with the worms of shame.

The will to climb was innermost in his nature. The path to

choose must have been obscure, for a long while, to his intelligence.

Originally he was an intellectual. The career of the writer must have appealed to him. But this is a difficult and thorny path, with solitude and toil and disappointment. There was no intellectual stability in this intellectual, and he did not care to win it through the ascetic sacrifices that are required for that purpose. There was stubbornness in him, but no perseverance. He was after immediate crops.

The dead earnest in which he talked to Ludwig about the literary, dramatic, and philosophical attempts of his youth is the best evidence of his mediocrity. "Under the influence of Gomperz," he stated, "I sketched a history of philosophy. Everything was burned afterwards. *Unfortunately [italics ours], together with that manuscript a monograph of greater value was destroyed, about the origins of Christianity.*" This was, and is, his usual way of speaking about himself. Even in the booklet which was meant to honour the memory of his dead brother, he occasionally tells of the "*famous* report to the Federal Secretaries" that he, Benito, gave in the early April of 1926, "aboard the ship *Cavour* that was to carry me to Libya." We find this entertaining self-decoration on page 47, and we hardly suppose that we might meet the same adjective elsewhere. We are wrong, however. There it is again on page 82, identically strutting: ". . . the eighteenth of August 1926 I pronounced the famous speech of Pesaro."

With such conceit a graphomaniac might well have risen, but by no means a writer. A vulgarly anticlerical and anti-Catholic novel (in which, we surmise, some hints were given of his ideas about the origins of Christianity) was translated into English several years after the author had reached the peak of power and his name had become, really, *famous* all over the world. The title, very expressive of the substance and style of the book, was *The Cardinal's Mistress*. Whether or not the novel sold is a minor matter. At any rate it did not become a classic. At approximately the same time Mussolini, while strictly forbidding in Italy the circu-

lation of any document recalling his previous revolutionary activity and thought and therefore also of *The Cardinal's Mistress*, turned again to drama, with different and up-to-date inspiration. He was inspired to think that Napoleon's downfall (due to the intrigues of Parliamentarism) and Cavour's struggles were fine topics for fine plays. He called to himself a popular Italian playwright, an adroit and witty imitator of Sardou, and confided to him the inspiration, adding besides the schemes. The playwright, Giovacchino Forzano, in whose bosom the creative seed had descended from on high, both times simply finished the work, only colouring the complete design: that is, at least, what Mussolini, the real author, later confided to his friend Ludwig. The Italians were not allowed to read their ruler's name on the posters; they knew, privately, whose the masterpieces really were; but they kept the secret and discreetly, although spontaneously, they went to the theatres to applaud Forzano. However, the secret was not withheld from foreign audiences, and there were producers, especially in Austria and Hungary, who staged if not both at least one of the dictatorial plays: namely, the Napoleonic. It has not been acknowledged as a classic of the contemporary theatre; perhaps because the masses are slow-minded, and an audience in a theatre is not very different from a hateful Parliamentary meeting.

It is well known that Mussolini, like David, plays a stringed instrument: in his case the violin. After half an hour of playing he feels calm; after an hour he is nervous and excited. Therefore in these last years he has stopped. But while no longer indulging in music, he has not renounced the subtler pleasure of æsthetic and critical thinking, and of occasional scholarship. In this latter field at least his naïveté is praiseworthy. In the *Life of Arnaldo* he candidly avows that he read the *Monumentum Ancyranum*, that is, "the stirring testament of Augustus, still carved on a Roman temple at Angora," in *Historia*, a magazine published by his brother's firm. There also he seems to suppose that the Psalms belong to the New Testament. In the *Talks* with Ludwig, although he

pretended to have read both parts of *Faust*, he was thrilled and seemingly surprised when Ludwig, spurring him toward a humanitarian conversion, showed him the lines in which the hundred-year-old adventurer—although still an accomplice in piracy and arson—turns to the draining of swamps and to the dream of a better and happier mankind. Those lines are exceedingly familiar, not only to real readers of Goethe but to any Italian opera-goer who has seen Boito's *Mephistopheles*.

The critical and æsthetic judgments are adequate to the scarcity and confusion of the information. Once he had expressed to an Italian poet his preference for the regular and traditional rather than the free verse: apparently because freedom, other people's freedom, was now distasteful to him even in poetry. Talking to Ludwig, he touched at random all arts and all centuries, with blessed self-enjoyment. "The greatest of all arts," he said, "is for me architecture, because it comprises everything." "This is very Roman," Ludwig remarked. "Such am I too," added Mussolini; "Greece appealed to me only from the side of philosophy." After this breath-taking piece of dialogue in which both the interviewed and the interviewer seem to agree that architecture was less important in Greece than in Rome, there comes a welcome "pause." This does not last, however, and Mussolini pushes on, confiding to the listener that immediately after architecture, tragedy is what he likes most. "Tragedy always excited me mightily." In his youth he loved Schiller's *William Tell*, and wrote an essay on it. Incidentally he also remembers that he wrote on Platen's works. In modern drama he prefers two plays by d'Annunzio (one of which is quite good, in its way, and the other quite bad, in any way); he praises Pirandello because "fundamentally, and beyond his purpose," Pirandello makes Fascist theatre by showing that "the world is such as we want to make it, is our creation"; he also appreciates Shaw, although now and again he may be annoyed by G. B. S.'s "hunt after originality." Having thus admitted that even G. B. S.'s "originality" is too much for his æsthetic taste, he passes to music, which should be his proper field.

In this section the most notable sentence is the one according to which "music, as a means of expression, is international, whilst in its intimate essence it is altogether national. . . . Nay," he insists, quite forgetful that a few pages or days earlier he had entirely denied the existence of races, going so far as to pretend that a man may choose his race, "I even deem music to be the profoundest expression of a race. . . . You," he proposes to Ludwig, without our being told whether or not the German biographer accepted the bet, "you put me in a dark room, near which one plays: I believe I'll distinguish German, French, Italian, Russian music." Naturally there are exceptions: for instance, Wagner. There, at least, dictator and historiographer agree. "Wagner," Ludwig decrees, "is the least German of all our composers." And Mussolini, capitalizing the sentence: "Wagner does not write really German music."

When at the end of this chapter Ludwig asks Mussolini whether there is any chance that he might sometime return to art, whereupon Mussolini definitely answers that he never will go back to "contemplation," the reader experiences a wholesome relief.

If he was interested in poetry and the fine arts almost as much as Nero, he was always hardly less busy about philosophy, and especially theology, than Wilhelm II.

As a young man, in 1904, he wrote a concise pamphlet under the title *God Does Not Exist*. The Universe is nothing but "the manifestation of matter, which is one, eternal, indestructible, had never a beginning, will never have an end." God is "a monstrous parturition of human ignorance." Our so-called soul is nothing else than our brain, which in its turn is a mechanism like a clock. The origin of religion is merely economic, a device invented by kings and oppressors to crush subjects and slaves. Belief and any kind of conformism are characteristic of beasts and inferior races. Christ most probably never existed; if he did he was a small and petty personality (*piccolo e meschino*). All that he achieved was to evangelize, in a couple of years, "a few villages and to persuade

a dozen ignorant vagrants—the dregs of the plebs of Palestine.”

Much later, when already a dictator, he fell for a couple of years under the influence of a Jesuit, and had a flirtation, if not with Christianity, with Catholicism. He did not go all the way, for at the end he would have met an authority, the Pope's, superior to his. He did not want any kind of conformism for himself, and nothing was ever dearer to him than his own liberty.

But only a permanent psychological obstacle like this, and not a theoretical objection, could keep him out of a political road to Damascus. In the realm of the mind everything is to his mind equivalent, and every doctrine has the same degree of probability and the same availability for rhetoric.

It seemed, in the juvenile pamphlet, that at least the hate for Christ was deeply rooted in his soul, or brain. Not only was Jesus to him a pygmy, a midget, but in a dramatic page—which was in great part a plagiarism—he opposed his universal theory of revenge and violence to the disgusting meekness of the provincial Jew.

However, when talking to Ludwig, he grants, at last, the greatness of Christ's personality, whose historical reality he does not doubt any longer. He goes so far as to put him even above Cæsar, who, according to him as well as to all the millions who have sheepishly conformed to the tenets of German historiography, is, with that one exception, the greatest man who ever lived. The motive of the exception is not clearly expressed. It certainly has nothing to do with religion and ethics. In the many years that had elapsed since the pamphlet against Father and Son he had had leisure enough to realize that Christ, instead of evangelizing just a few villages and a dozen of vagrants, had succeeded in conquering an Empire larger than Cæsar's. His newfangled admiration for Christ is another homage to glory and power. Or else he would have tried to become a Christian.

On the contrary, and very far from sincerely shifting toward Christianity, he had echoed shortly before, in one of his skirmishes against the Vatican, one of the usual commonplaces when telling



his deaf-mute Parliament that Christianity would have vanished like innumerable other Oriental sects if the Roman Empire had not adopted it. Naturally he failed to point out the reason why the Roman Empire adopted Christianity, and not another sect or none at all.

As for God himself, he is now somewhat more moderate and he does not "exclude completely, somewhat like Renan, that in the course of millions of years a supernatural apparition may have taken place. It may also happen that, within millions of years, such an apparition may be repeated." What seems to be of fundamental importance to him is that such "apparitions," if any, must be relegated into the remotest past or future, millions of years far away, and not interfere at all with his, Mussolini's, freedom.

Why not be an apparition himself?

## *The Anarchist and the Artist*

THIS is the mind of the man whom so many—more or less compulsorily in Italy, but quite freely abroad—have called a genius. An intermediate place between Italian and foreign applauders was held by an American Muse, named Ezra Pound, cackling: genius! genius! from an orchard in Rappallo.

A striking feature in the intellectual career of Mussolini is that no progress is noticeable in it. He starts with the atheistic pamphlet in which, mentioning Plato among the forerunners of modern atheism, he does not neglect to explain that Plato was "a Greek philosopher, a disciple of Socrates." He reaches the peak with the

*Encyclopædia in nuce* of the *Talks* with Ludwig, and the peak is at the same level as the start. In the middle of his course, when the name of Einstein suddenly became popular, he wrote an article in which he assumed that Einstein's relativity means that everything is relative, nothing absolute, and therefore all incongruities are allowed to the politician.

Theoretically, although only theoretically, it is admissible that a mind totally devoid of philosophical, æsthetic, and religious interests can yet be the mind of a great statesman. It is absurd to suppose that in a soul, or brain, where such futility and inconsistency can thrive as Mussolini, the artist and philosopher, has evidenced for thirty years, there may be place left for earnestness and greatness of any objective kind.

Anywhere, but especially in the Italian and Dantean tradition, the supreme ideal of human ambition consists in the hope of being a poet or a statesman or both. Young Mussolini, like so many youngsters, wanted to be both. This is in itself no blame.

But poetry and thought are difficult, whereas the life of action seems facile. The subjective greatness, or better said, the origin of Mussolini's luck, lay in the resoluteness with which—aside from a number of desultory fits—he submitted whatever remained of his literary and philosophical ambitions to the political purpose.

Often, a poet who has failed becomes a journalist, a philosopher who has failed becomes an orator. This happened to Mussolini too. He is renowned the world over as a great journalist and orator.

The management of the newspapers, small and large, of which he was the editor-in-chief never exceeded the standard of the yellow or tabloid press. His editorials, utterly unscrupulous in logic and information, attained not seldom a raw efficacy in sarcasm and threats. The same is valid about his oratory, whose most substantial secret, as well as of his writing, is the eradication of words like *perhaps* or any other that might express or infuse a feeling, however slight, of honest doubt. An improvised dogmatism, in

hammering rhythm, is the kernel and pulp of his word, written or spoken. Whatever he thought or said yesterday, even if, especially if it was the contrary of what he thinks or says today, seems to be deleted from his consciousness and must be deleted from the memory of those who read or listen. No one, in the Italian libraries, is allowed to consult the articles of Mussolini's socialistic or anarchistic time, and one of his courtiers worded fittingly the master's fondest desire when he imposed upon all Italy the slogan: "Mussolini is always right."

The visible image of that kind of mentality may be contemplated in such motion pictures as *Mussolini Speaks*. With grimaces and contortions, which the audience beneath the lofty balcony does not see and which only the close-ups of the camera can record, he literally squeezes himself into words that find no response in either his heart or his mind.

This barbaric culture and art—far worse than no culture or art at all—certainly is one of the weightiest constituents of his personality. It is meaningless to regret that his poverty prevented him from having a university education, and that his intellectual preparation, that of an elementary schoolteacher, remained always of the mongrel sort; since the historical experiences of our age are far from proving that a high scientific training necessarily fosters good will and real knowledge: much of the most hateful nationalism and war-mongering, in Germany as well as in France and elsewhere, has been and is a specific product of those hothouses of specialized learning. At any rate Mussolini personally felt, although carefully hiding his feeling, that there was inferiority not only in his social origins but also in the quality of scholastic training that was allotted to him. This latter kind of inferiority he tried to counterbalance with a screaming dogmatism; which was to him an emergency expedient to pass his examinations.

The repressed scholar and the disappointed poet worked on in the surviving politician. He used those impulses, perverting their aims.

There is hardly need of a trial when the defendant pleads guilty, although, as in the present case, without any guilty conscience.

Ludwig speaks:

"You have repeatedly confessed, in your moments of greatest eloquence, that the increase of your personality is the goal of your life. You have said: 'Of my life I will make a masterpiece,' or: 'I will dramatize my life.' How can so proud a nature write afterwards: 'My highest goal is the public interest?'"

The attempt of Mussolini at patching up the contradiction is very distraught. He asserts that no individual can sever himself from the race ("public interest") in which he was born, immediately after to stress that "there are no races," that it is "just an illusion of the spirit, a feeling," and that, as a consequence, anybody might even choose his race. He only avoids confiding to Ludwig how many times, in private outbursts with occasional confidants or with his poor brother, he had bitterly complained that destiny had put in his hands such a shabby, miserable material as the Italian nation, and that he was not in a position to "choose his race."

The confession of the æsthete, who wants to make of his personal life "a masterpiece" and treats all other human beings as dead, plastic stuff, could not be more plenary. Nevertheless it is superabundantly confirmed in other pages of the *Talks*.

Poetic imagination, he says, is indispensable to the man of action. Eloquence, the power of the word, he adds, has an inestimable value for him who rules. "Only," he explains, "it is necessary to vary it continually. To the mass one must speak imperiously, before an assembly, reasonably"—which, incidentally, gives an inkling of the reason why, loathing all reason and reasonableness, he has ceaselessly striven toward the abolition of all assemblies—"familiarily to a small group." In this description, fairly complete, of the statesman as an actor, there is one lacuna: how, and according to what technique, he speaks to a man alone,

for instance to Ludwig, when aiming at the particular effects in domestic and foreign propaganda that he has in mind.

Only faith moves mountains—he says at another time—not reason. The latter is a tool, but can never be the force that moves the mass. Today less than before. *“People nowadays have less time to think. The modern man’s disposition to believe is unbelievable.”* Who knows it better than he?—“When I feel the mass in my hands, as it yields, or when I mix with it and it almost crushes me, then I feel like a lump of that mass. And yet there remains in me something of a hostility, like the distaste that the poet feels against the matter on which he is working. Does not the sculptor sometimes break the marble in ire because it does not take under his hands exactly the shape which it had in his first vision?”

He makes a pause, then he concludes: “All depends on that, dominating the masses as does the artist.”

The artist. The poet. The sculptor. Even the poet’s distaste, even the famous ire of the sculptor against the disobedient block. All the odds and ends from the cheapest d’Annunzio, all the dish-washing from the witch-kitchen of cosmopolitan æstheticism and decadence.

Once again, very candidly, Ludwig asks him:

“During your trip to Rome”—he knew, Ludwig knew, that the March on Rome happened to happen in a sleeping car—“did you feel like an artist who starts his work or like a prophet who obeys his mission?”

Mussolini answers just one word:

“Artist.”

Thousands of people read, unhorrified, this statement, a final one.

The “masterpiece” which the artist Mussolini has been building and which he hopes to achieve is of a stuff that is made of human flesh and souls, of tears and blood.

Timur, the Mongol conqueror, a master-builder and a protector

of the arts, actually built walls of stones and living men. Metaphorically, although no less really in effect, this is the architecture and poetry of the modern autocrat, who thinks of tyranny and war, of usurpation and mass murder, as of one of the fine arts.

His plays and poems vanished in the world of the possible, or came stillborn into the world of the ridiculous. But as Goethe put it, "the insufficiency—here grows to Event"; and what was ridiculous in the realm of the mind became tragic in the world of fact.

This indeed, a combination of the ridiculous with the tragic, is the only definition available of what is usually called the monstrous.

## *Early Career and Failure*

**T**HE little man was an anarchist and an artist.

He said once, with a whimsical exaggeration, that every anarchist is a dictator who failed.

His road to greatness consisted in making, of the anarchist who failed in him, the dictator who won.

But this very word would have been, in his youth, incomprehensible to him. He was no artist in the real meaning, neither was he an inventor of ideas. He could not be an announcer or forerunner, not even of himself. His low-class, belated culture did not yet put him in contact with the reactionary literature of France or Germany. D'Annunzio could hardly be to him anything else than a despicable bourgeois minstrel.

For many years his eagerness, led or misled by an almost aching and neurotic sense of smell, went after opportunities, always deceiving.

Whoever knows his personality, as he himself described it in the few words we have chosen among the many he has uttered—an atavistic avatar of the Renaissance man, a retrograde *homunculus* wanting to enlarge himself into a reality of today and tomorrow—may safely overlook the details of his career. His life was altogether inside, as several of his interlocutors guessed from the aloofness of his starved eyes, staring at the other man but never mingling with his personality. Whatever events he made or underwent were feathers, caducous, on the immutable shape of his soul; whatever objective ideas he seemed to adopt were the protective shades of the chameleon.

Since he too, Mussolini too, is a human being and our brother, there was a human moment in his early youth.

That he, instead of carrying on as an elementary schoolteacher and a noodle-eater, an Albana-drinker, in his native Romagna, wandered to Switzerland, there to earn a scant bread as a manual worker by the sweat of his brow and to take part in debates where he, while denying God and ridiculing Christ, proclaimed the gospel of universal brotherhood and universal peace; that the real purpose of his hegira was the desire of escaping military servitude and of embracing his freedom; that he was jailed and fingerprinted; that he sometimes slept or hid under the arches of a railway-bridge; that on one occasion he snatched food from two Englishwomen picnicking in a park: these were and are his real glories. The blame for the transgressions against the written and common law does not affect a higher feeling of sympathy toward the solitary struggler who sought his life at his own risk. Charlie Chaplin would have liked what he did and endured; at first he would also have liked him who endured and did.

Then came the momentous decision, hastened by the police of Geneva, of his return to Italy and to Romagna. He had proved inadequate to the solitary effort, to the ascetic challenge of the real anarchist, as he had been inferior to the tortured self-sufficiency of the real artist. He found contact again with his stock and ground.

The years between 1909 and 1914, from the twenty-sixth to the thirty-first years of his age, contain all his career as a Socialist editor and organizer. For a short time he was in Trento, the Italian city at that time still under Austrian rule. That, during those months, he seemed sensitive to the national irredentism of the city where he happened to live, is a legend invented by a lady friend of his, many years later. Even were it true, it would prove nothing except his already well-proved promptitude of adjustment to the environment. Ideas had never for him a worth in themselves.

Immediately after, at any rate, he totally forgot about whatever his experience in Trento might have been. His five years in Forlì and later in Milan were all one fight against fatherland and nation.

The dates and details of this period are irrelevant. What happened to him and what he happened to do were only an allegory of his solipsistic soul. No less irrelevant are the financial and sexual gossip.

When saying that money and wealth never had an attraction for him he is genuine. He took his food and shelter and clothes wherever and however he could: from friends and benefactors, from party funds, from organizations of workmen. Later on, in 1914, he took money from the French Government to found his personal newspaper. Still later, in 1919, he confiscated money entrusted to him and meant for d'Annunzio and Fiume. Still later, in 1935 and 1936, he, the living incarnation of the State, absorbed the shares of the industries, the savings of the banks, and slipped the wedding rings off the peasant women's fingers.

Who lives for the altar lives by the altar. Saint Paul had said this. Mussolini is not and never was after his luck and wealth, but after his freedom and power.

It seems accurate that there is no place for him in the Hell of gluttony and of such other minor sins. He interrupts his work by drinking a glass of milk. He is a teetotaller, he does not smoke, from time to time he breaks his vegetarian diet by eating "a small



fish." Any supreme quality, and even absolute evil, requires a certain amount of virtue and even of renunciation. The conventional type of the classical tyrant, who was a wanton, an idler, a gourmand, a Harpagon, has been done away with by Mussolini. This particular originality and greatness must be granted to him: that in all stages of his life he, later imitated by Hitler, has used virtue as an instrument of evil.

It has been whispered that he has heaped up a fortune, at home and abroad. Even if that is so, his fortune is a reserve for a political emergency, not a source of actual or imaginary pleasure. Napoleon was called the "unamusable," the one whom nobody and nothing could amuse. At least in this respect the pupil has surpassed the master. The disinterestedness of his Self-worship is above all doubt.

For the same reason all stories about his pathological conditions are of no significance. A biography of Mussolini, as sketched or documented by scandal-mongers, remains inconclusive: a fog upon a mystery.

As far as the historian and not the tattler is concerned, it is likely that Freud would not have very much to say about Mussolini's psychoanalysis. He would probably hand over the case to his colleague Jung, in whose conception any single phenomenon, including the sexual, in an individual life is rather a manifestation than the ultimate substance of the all-embracing ego problem.

Two women, as far as the historian is concerned, had a definite influence on Mussolini. The first was a Russian-Jewish émigrée, who tried to infuse in him the conviction that the future belonged to the socialist revolution, and wanted him to be for Italy what Lenin was to be for Russia. The second was an Italian-Jewish authoress, formerly a Socialist but ineradicably rooted in the middle bourgeoisie in which she had been brought up. She not only introduced Mussolini, the blacksmith's son, to a white-collar society; but, having a tinge of cosmopolitan culture and art and being acquainted with the derivatives from French decadence such

as syndicalism and neo-monarchism, helped him mix the socialist-nationalistic cocktail by which he, rather a zealous bartender than an honest drunkard himself, was later to intoxicate his nation and several others.

Both the Russian and the Italian Jewesses were intellectual and instrumental experiences: tools to serve the only purpose which inflamed his will. Wife and children acquired a wider significance much later, when he, already an established dictator, resolved to exemplify his novel doctrine of State and Church.

Persons and events as well as ideas were shadows of his inner self, insubstantial in themselves. This is what makes inconclusive and wearisome any detailed biography of Mussolini, whose events and deeds, intimately arbitrary, are merely determined by the pressure of a changing environment upon his eagerness, which, never changing, remains indifferent to the directions and qualities and is sensitive only to the degrees of intensity, or to the amount and speed of its own satisfaction. This also is what makes meaningless any discussion about his socialism and about his so-called conversion to something different.

Socialism, as he preached and practised it between 1909 and 1914, was a ready-made product, handed to him by his social surroundings. The pillars of Marxian orthodoxy were already shaken by scientific criticism, inside and outside the party; at the same time, the vogue of socialism among the intellectual élite seemed to be fading. His mind, untrained in the search for truth and therefore slow and passive, hardly noticed either fact. He clung to the tenets of social revolution as he had received them from his father or from his Russian friend, in Predappio or in Switzerland, without carrying any personal contribution whatsoever to the development of socialist and economic theory. Capitalism and the capitalist state, or, unqualifiedly, the State—namely, the might and wealth of the privileged groups—were the targets of his envy; universal brotherhood and world peace in the classless society were, quite orthodoxly, his alleged hopes.

Four elements of Italian and European culture touched tan-

mentally the surface of his personality without affecting its permanent core.

It seems that in Switzerland he had somehow come in contact with Vilfredo Pareto, professor at Lausanne—whose *Mind and Society* did not appear, however, until 1916. The importance of this contact was later fabulously magnified, until in 1937 the Faculty of Lausanne unblushingly conferred an honorary degree on the visitor of former days. At any rate there was in Pareto's theory of history a pessimistic sarcasm, nay, a sneer, and a restless bitterness which fitted Mussolini's temper. There was, besides, a much-promising moral indifference toward any kind of political doctrine and practice, all of them being considered as issuing from a social determinism no less inflexible than the mechanism of nature. That indifference, like any kind of moral indifference, unavoidably inclined toward the side of evil. There was, rather unaccountably, in Pareto's mechanism a large place left for the individual's arbitrariness and a sub-species of aristocratic anarchism. The tendency of the system, however confused, was toward reaction and antidemocratic involution. Mussolini stored this latter implication for the future.

When he came back to Italy he found d'Annunzio's reputation well established, no longer only in small intellectual groups but also in larger masses of the population, and the poet's personality towering over all the other writers. He did not come in contact with d'Annunzio, who stood too far above him, but he extracted from the work of the poet and dramatist some quintessences of violence and revolt. Moreover, he found in d'Annunzio a further stimulus to his worship of Nietzsche, whom he had read at least partially a few years before, learning from him only what was apt to his mind—the idea or word of the Superman, or wild blond beast—with the understood correction that the Superman to come might also be of southern and dark complexion. However, it took several years before he came under the actual influence of d'Annunzio's whole personality and teaching. One day finally he changed even his script, which had been so far an or-

dinary cursive one, into the stiff ambitious style, with commanding capitals and angles as sharp as bayonets, which the world at large knows now as his own but which really is an imitation of the megalomaniac penmanship that d'Annunzio's goose quill has displayed for over forty years on his magnificently hand-made and watermarked sheets of paper.

The first decade of the century saw also the sweeping success, in a larger audience than is usually concerned with philosophy, of Croce's philosophy. It was called idealism, or neo-idealism. From idealism also Mussolini could in his own way draw vital nourishment for his mind. Philosophic idealism was to him the doctrine teaching that mind and will, nay, the individual mind and will, make the world, and that the world in itself has no existence at all.

Fourth and last: he came in desultory contact with a group of young people in Florence who published weeklies and magazines, where they had a laboratory for insufficient intellectual experiences and for masterpieces to come, and where nothing was continuous except the belief that youth is supreme and that it was the task of a smart juvenile gang like theirs to sap the edifice of academicism and conservatism and to build a new one on an ever-changing design, for life, dream, poetry, and the fine arts. Marinetti and Futurism were at several moments connected with the so-called Florentine movement.

All these tendencies, parallel to the disintegration of contemporary culture in France and elsewhere, were more or less obviously tinged with a reactionary dye. Democracy, of a sort, and the bourgeoisie held the power; Italian socialism, fairly meek and sentimental, seemed a by-product of the democratic bourgeoisie. It was a rule in the smart set to scoff at democracy, bourgeoisie, liberalism, and socialism.

Croce himself, who in many respects was superior to all the rest, had dismissed the socialism of his early years, turning to something that was not quite identical with the economic and political toryism, or conservative liberalism, which would have been natural to him as a landowner and scholar. In his *Philosophy of*

*the Practical*, published in 1909, he upheld the Machiavellian theory of power and state, and inserted also a theoretical apology for the Holy Inquisition—which was *really holy*, as he, though not at all a Catholic, emphasized—considering it an instance of the unavoidable and philosophically legitimate use of violence in politics. At about the same time he published an Italian translation of Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*, accompanying it with a very flattering preface and pushing its diffusion with all the power of publicity at his disposal. The little book, a classic of intellectual and moral disorder, obliterated altogether from socialism whatever features of humanitarian feeling and rational finalism it had shown even in its fiery German-Jewish prophets, disfiguring it into a Ragnarök or Wagnerian twilight: a gleeful dream of universal subversion and destruction, which he called religious upheaval, or renovation, or Syndicalism, or creative myth of the general strike. Croce delighted in Sorel because of the moral value he supposed in the latter's opposition to optimism, pacifism, humanitarianism, and all the other trashy ideals of the "eighteenth-century mentality," which he ever and wholeheartedly abhorred. But the effect of the book by far exceeded his expectations. It united in one scum all the intellectual hysterias of twentieth-century Italy. Now even the meanest scribes in d'Annunzio's herd felt entitled to claim a philosophic, nay, a mystic, justification for their heroic-erotic daydreams.

Mussolini, however, slow-paced, did not yet follow the black suggestions that were implied more or less directly in those blackish tendencies. He still clung to the assumption that socialism, a revolutionary socialism, was his opportunity. To be sure, he drew from Pareto or Sorel, d'Annunzio or Croce alike, whatever encouragement he needed or wanted in his fight against the soft-boiled socialism of the official party and in his hatred for compromising, Freemasonic, half-bourgeois methods of Socialist politics. All of them, including also his occasional Florentine acquaintances, were interpreted by him as teachers of a radical Machiavellism in a political school whose coat of arms had more room

for the lion than for the fox, and no room at all for the dove. But the direct, subversive action which he coveted was still one-hundred-percent red; at the end of the struggle he still visioned, or thought he visioned, a classless, pacified, scientific, international society. Nietzsche himself, the prophet whom he later was to exploit as a herald of tyranny and of war for war's sake, and whom he formerly had cherished as an inspirer of individual anarchism, was at that time an ambivalent or plurivalent oracle to him; and he did not hesitate to complete in his own way a famous Nietzschean sentence, bestowing on it the halo of a socialist anticipation, precursory of the Millennium. Herman Finer, one of Mussolini's biographers, quotes him as writing, "almost in Nietzsche's words": "The bridge between man as animal and man as human, the bridge between prè-history and history, the bridge which will lead humanity from the struggle for life to an agreement for the sake of life, will be built."<sup>1</sup> Here the Nietzschean metaphor of mankind as an evolutionary bridge was utilized for something good and true—for the idea that such a bridge leads to Man as to the complete fulfilment of a human ideal and hope and not to the atavistic reversal of the frenzied Superman. It is not surprising, however, that Mussolini's mind, capable of retaining only what fitted his practical opportunity of the day, quickly cancelled that ephemeral truth, the inspiration of an instant.

His action in the years of the immediate pre-war time scarcely needs an explanation for those who have watched his action in the years of dictatorship. From 1923 onward he has steadily tried to set the world afire, using his conquered Italy as an incendiary torch. From 1909, and especially from 1911 to 1914, he tried in a smaller setting to kindle Italy, waving as a flame his subversive Romagna.

At first he thought that the Libyan war, in 1911, and whatever proletarian discontent was thereto connected might become the opportunity he sought. He wrote articles and delivered speeches condemning that "miserable war of conquest" which the govern-

<sup>1</sup> Herman Finer, *Mussolini's Italy*, New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1935.

ment propaganda masqueraded as a Roman glory, and he brought about, at least in his provincial section, a united front of the anti-war parties. "Socialists and Republicans were united. A strike was engineered. Barricades were put up. For two days there were turbulence, cavalry charges, and many casualties. Mussolini proceeded from argument to violent harangues, and thence to incitements to open resistance to the Government. When the cavalry charged, the crowd left him in the *piazza*. He was arrested. . . . Condemned to five years' imprisonment, he appealed, and actually served only five months. . . . The obvious thing was to expect little of cowards and to hope a great deal to have the cavalry under his own command. Yet the evidence . . . seems to show that Mussolini himself had a fit of nerves when the action was commenced against him. He tried to put the blame on his fellow-culprits and the crowd, and suspected his counsel."

This is the summary of events as outlined by Herman Finer, an opponent of Fascism but an admirer of Mussolini's genius: probably a better authority on Sociology and Government than on spiritual appreciation of individuals, in which latter field he does not seem to have freed himself from the aftermath of romantic hero-worship and the idolatry of success.

It would be arbitrary, however, to suppose that Mussolini had at that time already consciously started to drift from Socialism to Reactionism, and that he had conceived as early as 1911 the ambition of having the king's cavalry under his command. On the contrary, he persisted in his extreme-leftist attempts, the most noted of which was the so-called "red week" of June 1914.

It was undoubtedly an advancement to pass from the two days of 1911 to the week of 1914; but it was a slight one. The plan was very ambitious. Mussolini and his close associate, the anarchist Malatesta, wanted to spread riot and revolution in all Central Italy, thereby breaking the backbone of the state—the railway between Rome and Milan—and snatching the disrupted nation. The plan collapsed almost farcically, without even the halo of "quasi-martyrdom" which, three years earlier, had accompanied

Mussolini into the short seclusion in the prisons of liberal Italy. Republics, carnival-like imitations of medieval communal life, were proclaimed in several small cities and towns, where Socialism and Communism found a surprising expression in a kind of Cockaigne, favoured by the epicurean suggestions of the balmy season. The supplies of food were given away or sold at nominal prices; a chicken could be had for five cents. Hence the popular name of "chicken-republics." At last the *jeunesse dorée* and the nationalists, among them some editors and reporters of the conservative *Giornale d'Italia*, paraded in the streets of Rome, showing with a kind of jolly grimness that they felt ready, if need be, to use violence against violence. That mobilization, although still Platonic, provided the first evidence—in Italy and in the world at large—that the methods of class warfare suggested by Socialist and Syndicalist propaganda to the insurgent workers might occasionally be adopted, in the opposite direction, by the ruling classes, if these at last were able to whip up their courage.

The red week ended in a colourless Sunday. Its Lord, rather ingloriously, reposed.

Finer, the impartial, thus summarizes the tragi-comedy, whose comic elements were the only catharsis: "For days the towns were in the hands of the people, the troops besieged in their barracks, people needed Socialist or Republican passports to be allowed to pass through the streets. It was expected that the republic would be proclaimed in Rome. . . . Mussolini believed that the Revolution had come. Yet Mussolini did not go into the *piazza* to lead the insurrection. After a week the Reformist wing called a truce."

After a few days the crown prince of Austria was assassinated in Sarajevo. After a few weeks the Great War broke out.

There was not even time for the remembrance of the red week to become ludicrous. Its flush—of wine and speeches—was thoroughly engulfed in the real blood-red of the starting catastrophe.

"Little man, what next?" Mussolini was utterly a failure.

Paddling in his canoe towards the invisible shore of a world-



revolution, he found himself instead amidst the hurricane of the World War.

## New Path

**I**NDEED, he had a voice, a loud one, in the executive of the Socialist party, and was the managing editor of the *Avanti!* the leading Socialist daily in all the country.

But the circulation of that daily was about one-tenth of the circulation of the greatest bourgeois daily in the same city; to which statistical statement must be added the consideration that almost no bourgeois, except politicians, ever read the *Avanti!* while nearly all the readers of the latter bought a bourgeois paper besides, better written and supplied with broader information, and to whose insistent influence their minds could not help submitting at least in some measure.

Socialism and the main stream of national life were asunder. Moderate socialism, with men like Bissolati, Bonomi, and even Turati, irresistibly drifted towards the main stream, losing day after day the vestiges of its former revolutionary character; what was left of revolutionary socialism, with Mussolini at its head, had made a sad display of impotence.

Offices and promotions within the Socialist party could not cheat Mussolini. What the Socialists did or did not do in France and Germany at the start of the war gave evidence of the impossibility of disrupting, against the pressure of national discipline, the capitalistic society. The assassination of Jaurès had been a warning.

Had he been endowed with a prophetic and creative mind—or even with a thoroughly but selflessly destructive one—he would

have persisted, expecting for Italy and Europe what Lenin expected, from the consequences of the war, for Russia and the world. But prophecy is a kind of patience, nourished by faith.

For two and a half months he kept on thundering from his paper against war, capitalism, patriotism, Belgium, intervention. Few heeded him.

Then came the battle of the Marne, a miracle. He had not been among those who, in Italy and elsewhere, had hoped against hope and prophesied the absurd, the victory of the democratic powers. Now the battle of the Marne, an accomplished fact, opened his eyes.

So far he had thought along a conventional and almost inherited line of thought, orthodox Marxism. What if a new and more powerful orthodoxy were taking its place? What if there were some truth, or some might, in the slogans of war against militarism and war, of war to end wars, of a world safe for democracy? If freedom, justice, progress, nay, if even proletarian revolution were on the points of French and British bayonets?

Such men as Bissolati would then have become foremost, and the right wing, or Reformist Socialism, would have celebrated a triumph. He saw himself marooned on a desert shore, severed from all opportunities, helplessly looking at the stream of history. After an inner gambling he decided to cross. On November 15, about two months after the battle of the Marne, the first issue of Mussolini's personal paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, appeared in Milan.

France supplied the money. There is nothing objectionable in her behaviour. Gasping under the menace of annihilation, it was her right to try all the chances. The prospective support coming from a young and isolated demagogue like Mussolini was not decisive. He could, however, help to bring further disorder in the already disordered front of neutralist or Germanophile Socialism.

Mussolini himself did not openly deny, later, the trade. He said that the money he needed at that time was not much. He

might have added later that that money, multiplied, flowed back to the Parisian press during the Ethiopian crisis.

As for the Mussolinian side of the bargain, it would have been shameful for an Italian patriot or for a genuine pacifist. But Mussolini had always advocated violence, and there was no substantial breach of promise if, the circumstances having changed, he advocated international violence instead of the civil strife which had become impossible. Neither was the man of the "red week" an Italian patriot pledged to countenance the independence of his country's foreign policy, and therefore to refuse foreign wages. He was, or still pretended to be, a revolutionist and internationalist, entitled to believe if he so liked that the interests of the international proletariat lay with the arms of the Entente. Lassalle's approach to Bismarck had been neither better nor worse than Mussolini's approach to France.

Whatever continuity there had been in his life remained so far uncompromised. There is, and there was, no fatality in history. If the aftermath of war has been reactionary dictatorship in one of the defeated countries, Germany, it has been progressive dictatorship in another one, Turkey, and dictatorial socialism in the third, Russia. A credible prophet in 1915 would have prophesied socialism in a defeated Germany, as in a highly industrialized country, obscurantism in backward Turkey, and no novelty at all in Russia, it being unsound to suppose that the Western powers could win and the Eastern ally fall. What materialized afterwards was devoid of compulsory logic. Democracy, with a slow ascent of the Labour parties, prevailed in the victor countries, but not so in Italy or Japan. Conservative kingship died in the vanquished countries, but not so in Bulgaria; it survived in the neutrals, but not so in Spain; it persisted unchanged in the victors, but not so in Italy, where the king was degraded to a dummy and promoted to Emperor.

All the chances of the future were wrapped in darkness, and there was no imperative reason to assume that Italy or any other

country, victorious, vanquished, or neutral, should fall after the war into a black age. A phenomenon like Fascism was not even on the lap of the gods, and a prophecy of it would have seemed delirious to everybody, to Mussolini first of all. It was fairly reasonable to suppose that the road of war for democracy and freedom might be for Italy the road to proletarian revolution. Mussolini was entitled to think that France was his tool, not he France's, and if a selfless purpose—no matter whether approvable in itself or not—had been genuine in him, he could have felt exonerated from blushing while cashing foreign checks. It is money that makes war, and no money could be expected from Italian industrialists and bankers, the immense majority of whom hated equally war and revolution, or from the Italian Government, whose course remained undecided.

Nobody ever was of so fragmentary a nature as consciously to renounce the purpose of unifying his life. Even today Mussolini entertains the hope of achieving some day the synthesis of Julius Cæsar and Nikolai Lenin, of authoritarian Empire and social subversion. Far easier seemed the amalgamation of war and revolution at the time of the democratic war.

The *Popolo d'Italia* was subtitled "a Socialist daily," and bore the mottoes "Who has steel has bread" and "Revolution is an idea which has found bayonets": the former borrowed from the socialist prophet Blanqui and the latter from Napoleon. The technique of the daily was adequate to Mussolini's confused and provincial mentality, considerably inferior to the average standard of Italian journalism; but the front page was enlivened by the tom-tom of the managing editor's coarse eloquence, behind which it was more natural to imagine a fist than pensively writing fingers. Such as they were, these articles helped trouble further the already troubled waters of Italian opinion, although their direct influence upon the events was comparatively slight, and by no means the decisive one that the Fascist legend later on fancied and forced all the nation to fancy. Scores of people—and not only Bissolati or d'Annunzio—found a much larger and more receptive

audience. On the other hand, many conservatives who would have liked, from patriotic or realistic motives, the intervention of Italy in war were alarmed by the companionship of the demagogue, and shrank cautiously into neutralism for fear of the implications that were visible in the unexpected warlike spirits of the fellow who five months earlier had staged the red week. Likewise, many moderate Socialists, who had been drifting toward intervention, at the sight of Mussolini unfurling the national banner were frightened by disgust into neutralism again.

Having advocated war, he had to go to war. This happened very late, and after noticeable hesitations. His personal intervention did not last very long, neither did it culminate in any particular deed which might have made him merit a military medal or a promotion on the battlefield.

There has been much talk about his general attitude toward physical pain and danger, talk as insignificant as any other kind of biographical gossip. Courage is seldom spontaneous in a human or animal being, unless spurred by actual need or unselfish passion or the spirit of honour. It is an extraordinary appearance in highly nervous natures and in profoundly self-seeking individuals. There is no reason to expect bravery of the heroic sort in a man like Mussolini. But during the war, as well as before and after it, he faced the inescapable situations and braced himself, in sport and fight, to a higher resistance than that which was immediately afforded by his natural temper.

The only significant episode of his war is the one retold by George Seldes:

"It was a quiet sector where the enemies had by a routine of action established a code of ethics. Every soldier who has ever kept his head down in the trenches knew and respected it. It was simply a live-and-let-live system by which firing was done at certain known intervals and a large part of the training-time was devoted to strictly human civilized activities. It made life possible—for a little longer for some men, the allotted peaceful span for others.

"The leading editorial warrior came to the trenches full of the fury he had preached in print. He demanded, first of all, why the sector was so quiet, why the Italian army didn't advance, why the war was not being fought as it should be. The replies did not satisfy him. One night of the first week at the front he was looking over the trenches, himself an easy mark for any Austrian sniper, when he beheld a soldier in the enemy line lighting a match. In a flash Corporal Mussolini had removed the pin from a hand grenade and thrown it in the direction of the smoker opposite him. The crack-boom and a small flame broke the quiet monotony of the sector.

"'Why did you do that?' the captain, who was making his rounds, asked of his corporal. 'They were sitting peacefully and not doing us any harm. They were smoking their pipes in silence and perhaps talking of their brides. Have you no heart? Why was it necessary to send them to death?'

"'If that is so, my captain,' replied Mussolini, in the account which his worshipping admirers tell to emphasize his patriotism, 'then perhaps we had all better go for a little promenade on the Milanese Corso, a more agreeable occupation, certainly.'

"'With great satisfaction the corporal learned the next day that his lucky grenade had killed two men and wounded five. But the established code also had been broken, and in retaliation the Austrian snipers picked off many Italians during food-delivery time and other previously peaceful hours, and the act of heroism resulted in useless deaths on both sides.' <sup>1</sup>

There is not even sadism, with its disinterested cruelty, in this attitude. There is merely the Machiavellian adept rehearsing the parts both of the killing lion and of the faithless fox, or the intellectual anarchist trying how the theories of Nietzsche and d'Annunzio work upon a given occasion, or the cold incendiary wanting the beautiful flame. D'Annunzio himself had sung: "Beautiful is the flame!" He had also pathetically complained that the work-

<sup>1</sup> George Seldes, *Sawdust Caesar*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1935.

men of his Settignano, during the Socialist riots of 1898, had not burnt up the trollies.

Painfully although not dangerously wounded by the accidental explosion of an Italian mortar, Mussolini left the front, never to see it again.

He was treated at first in a field hospital, near the lines.

"As soon as the Austrians got wind of my being there they started to bomb furiously the hospital," he said to Ludwig many years later, reaching a climax of humour not so usual in his prose.

Neither for the Austrians nor for the Italians was he yet a great man.

His real life begins with the end of the war.





## IV

# March on Rome



## *Fascism and Bolshevism*

THE history of the rise of Fascism, of its conquest of Italy, of its march to Empire, should not be retold in particularized sequence. The intellectual and emotional elements of such history have been set forth in the preceding pages, as the economic background and the political and military events have received a world-wide publicity in many books of Fascists, Antifascists, and neutrals, and in innumerable pages of news and documents from the March on Rome to the Ethiopian and the Spanish wars.

It is now well known to everybody that the assumption according to which Fascism came up as an emergency defence of Italy against an impending Bolshevik peril is not substantiated by facts. A quotation, decisive, from Mussolini himself, has become deservedly familiar to every student of contemporary history. "To say that there still exists a Bolshevik peril in Italy," thus he wrote in his newspaper on July 2, 1921, "is to substitute certain insincere fears for the reality. Bolshevism is vanquished. Nay, more, it has been disowned by the leaders and by the masses. The Italy of 1921 is fundamentally different from that of 1919. This has been said and proved a thousand times."

There had not been a Bolshevik peril even in 1919 or 1920. Disorders, strikes, and occasional riots were more or less common in all countries as an aftermath of war; they seemed in Italy particularly alarming to foreign tourists and salesmen, disappointed in their quest for easy enjoyment and smooth business, but they could have been met by the ordinary resistance of the national

body and by the elasticity of the liberal institutions, as happened in France and elsewhere. They were in fact met by that resistance and elasticity in Italy, in spite of an economic and social situation objectively more difficult than in France or elsewhere. In September 1920, the workers seized a number of factories; a fortnight later, without a single intervention of army or police, without one shot fired, they surrendered to their own irresoluteness and incompetence, calling back to their places the capitalists and the engineers. As long as the strange episode lasted, Mussolini showed signs of nervousness and perplexity. He sided at times more with the rebels than with the owners: obviously afraid lest his forecast of the approaching historical weather should prove wrong and opportunity, red again instead of black, might desert his ambition.

The Bolshevik danger for Europe, if such a danger had ever been at hand, was vanquished in August 1920 by the French-Polish army on the battlefield of Warsaw, not by the black-shirted gangs in the squares of Italy. The situation, certified as nearly normal by Mussolini himself in July 1921, became much more so in the following months and in the following year. Real unruliness and turmoil began in Italy only when Fascism started the civil war against the so-called Reds, and were the creation of Fascism, not of that awkward Communism, limp and anæmic, which had been "disowned by the leaders and by the masses." If Fascism had really been an emergency protection of the nation against the red peril, it should have promised to last approximately as long as the peril lasted, whereas from the beginning it had claimed a permanent character and an indefinite future.

The scarlet phantom, evoked and gigantized by the Italian Fascists in search of a retrospective rationalization of their deed, became easily popular wherever similar crimes needed similar exonerating circumstances. It was to be highly successful in Germany, and its automatic performances were and still are insistently rehearsed in France and in other countries as well. But if the Bolshevik peril, as vulgar opinion sees it, consisted of violence, tyr-

anny, and infringement of the rights to individual expression and free use of personal property, it is quite clear that Fascism was the particular sort of Bolshevism allotted to Italy, and later to Germany, and that only through Fascism and Nazism did those features of oppression and subversion materialize in both countries.

To be sure, several industrialists and bankers—but not all of them—helped Mussolini with advice and money. It may be accurate to contend that, without the support of that section of capitalism, Fascism would not have conquered the country. This is, however, not tantamount to saying that the rise of Mussolini and Fascism can and must be explained as a merely economic happening, and that Fascism must be described as the aggressive defence, a sally of besieged capitalism. If such explanation were apt, we should have seen and should see some sort of Fascism wherever capitalism and property are menaced. We should have seen Fascism, under the sign of the Croix de Feu, triumphant in France in June 1936, when numberless workers struck, hundreds of factories were seized, shortage of food and disorder of transportation harassed the middle classes—when, in other words, the disturbances of post-war Italy reappeared magnified, but nevertheless a moderately leftist government could weather the storm, as a liberal government had done in 1920 Italy during the occupation of the factories.

Nay, if Fascism were merely or primarily an economic phenomenon, the conservative reaction against the attacking proletariat, it would have risen first of all in Russia! At any rate it would have started in any land where capitalism was really strong, in France for instance or America, not in Italy where all classes, the capitalist included, were almost equally weak, and where no such social warfare could ever have flared had not a huge and unpredictable amount of the liquid fuel of passion been poured over the scant heap of objective conditions.

Even those among the capitalists who joined and fed the Fascist movement were inspired by passion far more than by interest.

They had, in 1922, nothing more to fear from a collapsed Communism and a confused Socialism. But they had experienced fear and distress, and they wanted their enemies to pass through the same ordeal. Their passion was revenge. They stamped their heel upon the fallen foe.

As for Mussolini himself, he did not want at all to become the tool of capitalism, as he had never wanted to become the tool of anything or anybody, not even of France when he took her money in 1914. His plan was, as it always had been, to drive mad the passions of others, and, having deprived them of their intellectual independence, to make them the tools of his own passion. At length he managed to do so even with the Italian capitalists, who fondly fancied they had drafted him and his bravoës for their purpose. They wanted to use him momentarily for some saturnalia of revenge; he permanently subjugated them. Now he is leading the chain which they drag, looking around to see whether all the rest of the world would maybe like to be riveted along with them and to give and share a comfortable feeling of unanimity and continuity.

The occasional complicity between a section—and only a section—of capitalism and Fascism was no permanent coincidence of real interests and beliefs. Neither did Mussolini acquire the mentality of an Agnelli or Pirelli, of a Rockefeller or Ford, nor had or have those capitalists and landowners the mentality and purposes of a Mussolini.

Coincidences, if any, can be traced only between Fascism and the petty bourgeoisie: young civilians who had laboured their way through the classical high school, then to stop for lack either of money or of endurance at the threshold of the university, or who even had snatched a university degree without coming therefore nearer to a tolerable standard of living or to a decent culture; young veterans who had been drafted into the army before having learnt a trade, and who now were or felt too old to start a normal life. Many of these had managed in some way to remember more vividly the advantages of military life—the reg-

ular salary, the songs, the jolly companionship, the stars on the sleeves, the gun at the belt, the feeling of power—than its tortures and horrors; and while the great majority of those who had gone through all the ordeal of war disliked and even opposed Fascism until their organizations were forced to surrender, nothing was better for those tantalized beginners than the promise of future good times and glory.

Undoubtedly Fascism recruited its mass of manœuvres from the so-called class of the petty bourgeoisie, of which Mussolini himself was a product: he, the half-workman and half-intellectual; he, the schoolmaster, the non-commissioned officer, the self-taught journalist, too well read for his neighbours and too devoid of Latin and philosophy for the strutting intelligentsia; he, finally, who, both spiritually and materially poor without despondency, and as immune to starvation as he was bereft of savings, had always walked and lived on the margin between the classes. In him the petty bourgeoisie mirrored itself with its muddled restlessness and its guilty self-consciousness; he belonged to it and it belonged to him. But even granting the possibility of defining a class economically and socially, no such possibility is at hand for the petty bourgeoisie: a border-zone inhabited by people with white collars and grey consciences, proletarians who mimic the colours and manners of the bourgeoisie, striving to "pass" unnoticed, like whitening Negroes. It is a social outgrowth longing to outgrow itself, a smoke or foam, whose effect is only to blur the outline of history, instantly to vanish in the emptiness of its endeavour. Rather than an objective entity the petty bourgeoisie is a state of mind.

It is now sufficiently clear that the social and economic factors and results which have accompanied the rise of Fascism explain it as little as the mushrooms crowding at the foot of the tree or the mistletoe clambering on its branches explains the tree itself. The interpretation of Fascism in terms of economic class warfare is utterly inadequate. Belied by all evidence, and ridiculed by Mussolini himself, it would have speedily vanished in thin air

had it not been adopted and cherished by the Reds, who found it gratifying indeed to their mythology of materialistic determinism, and remained unaware that by lifting Fascism to the dignity of a dialectic necessity of history they were idealizing a freak and playing into the hands of their worst adversaries.

No refuge can be found in any kind of dialectics or rationalization. No Hegel or Marx has the key to Fascism, and no prophet ever had prophesied anything like it. Fascism remains what it is: an outburst of emotionalism and pseudo-intellectualism, thoroughly irrational in its nature.

## *The Ego and His Own*

SO MUCH about the first legend. Fewer words are needed to explode the second legend, already long exploded: the one about a religious conversion of Mussolini from Socialism to Nationalism, from the destructive hatred of his fatherland that had inspired all his youth to a mystic cult of Italy and Rome.

He was over thirty-five years of age at the end of the war; he was nearly forty at the moment of the march on Rome. At such an age a religious conversion does not happen in the obscurity of the subconscious; a crisis of that kind is accompanied by fervour in service of the new faith and distress about the past error and sin; enthusiasm and shame, disinterestedness and repentance, are present in every attitude of the convert.

There is nothing to document or otherwise evidence such states of mind in the alleged conversion of Mussolini. Neither at that time nor later was he able to express his feeling toward Italy with



that particular simplicity and throb that are the signs of selfless love; there was no pause of troubled silence or meditative retirement between the first and the second periods of his life; his fist-clenching, jaw-protruding eloquence remained inexhaustibly the same, without a single day's vacation. Never did he speak of his past error and sin, and of his former companions who were still tarrying on that path of perdition, with that unanalysable compound of abhorrence and compassion which is the unmistakable accent of any neophyte.

His fundamental attitude toward life did not change. It was, as it had been, anarchism: not indeed in the shape of an intellectual theory and practical action aiming at the freedom, however Utopian, of all mankind; but as an emotional impulse yearning after the deliverance of the One. Volpe, the Fascist historian, mentions among the books read by young Mussolini, Max Stirner's gospel of anarchism, *The Ego and His Own*. He certainly had read it, most intensely, and transfused its supposed meaning into his blood.

At first perhaps, as a youngster, he would have liked to have his freedom by himself, without collaboration or conflict with his fellow-men: an experience of pure individualistic anarchism. But such experience is possible to none, except perhaps hermits and beggars; and even Nietzsche had been allowed to walk where he liked and to think as he liked only by a benevolent bourgeois institution, the University of Basle, which paid him a yearly pension.

The circumstances of Mussolini's family and group life in Italy, and of his voluntary exile in Switzerland, contained the imperative lesson that no freedom is possible for the individual, except in the organism of society. Freedom must be conquered either with the others or against the others. For long years Mussolini acted as a Socialist, trying to win his freedom by the freedom of the others. He did not succeed. It is not the destiny of the anarchist to substitute new laws for old, but to abolish all law. He must conquer his freedom *against* the others.

D'Annunzio had already quite openly, and very insistently, proclaimed such doctrine. His hero, in novels and plays as well as in autobiographical poems, was by definition "the abolisher of all law." In a play, produced only a few years before the war and significantly entitled *Più che l'Amore* (More than Love), the heroic or rhetorical will of a superpatriot and prospective imperial conqueror of dark Africa abides in the same protagonist with the most horrifying crimes and lusts, which he proudly avows as another aspect of his superiority and a challenge against society and law. The possibility and even the necessity of individualistic anarchism and ruthless nationalism coming together lay in the things themselves, since the attitude of nationalism toward human solidarity and international law is quite identical with the attitude of the individualistic anarchist—or even of the individual criminal—toward any law whatsoever. But there is undeniably to d'Annunzio's credit the achievement of having transferred this virtual concomitance into actual experience. Much more than by his books and plays, the convergence of anarchism and nationalism was now evidenced by his astounding personal career.

Mussolini, the newcomer, had carefully read the master; he had even subjected himself to the discipline of imitating his script. He had also watched and envied his career. Neither was, as stated above, his education or *Cyropædia* restricted to this one master and example. In Blanqui, as well as in Sorel, he had read about the grandeur and sanctity of violence; in Nietzsche, as well as in Croce, he had found likewise the theory of politics as divorced from any kind of ethical obligation, and therefore, more or less explicitly, as one of the fine arts.

The tendency to consider the state as a work of art—by which, in the particular case, is meant a mere æsthetic harmony between means and ends—had been very common in the Italian Renaissance. A Swiss historian, Burckhardt, in the course of the nineteenth century had portrayed that tendency very vividly and at-

tractively indeed, although with no purpose of fostering a similar tendency among generations to come. However, the book had been widely read by the new intellectual youth of Italy, and together with other German books of the same time and of analogous inspiration had had its share in dispersing that feeling of aversion and almost abhorrence with which the ethical Italy of the Risorgimento had looked at the perverse splendours of the Renaissance and at their fatal outcome.

Thus enhanced in several directions by the environment in which it had grown, and checked in other directions by those self-same circumstances, the personality of Mussolini emerged, at the moment of its maturity, as a reversion to the type of the statesman as artist, or of the Conquering Fox. To be sure, it was a very subordinate kind of Renaissance: devoid of Greek and Latin, of artistic grace and majesty, and of the real, not managed, valiancy that sometimes shone in the adventure of a fight to the finish. It was a Renaissance ugly and cheap, a plaster cast wrapped in newspapers. But this is often the feature of emergences and resurgences: that they are degeneracies. The measure of Mussolini's personality is such that in the natural society and competition of his peers and superiors, in the real Renaissance, he hardly would have carried himself above the rank of a chieftain at Predappio or of a signore in Forli. But this is often the feature of unexpected and almost unnatural growths: that unless they be immediately choked they spread with the luxuriance of weeds, choking instead all the slumbering resistances around them. All dikes have broken in our age, and if a wave of events starts at Predappio or Forli, unless it be immediately checked, it is bound to roll all over the seven seas.

Finer, the impartial, the sociologist, the quiet Britisher, who knows nearly everything about Fascism and does not like it, but palpates with connoisseur hands the statue of his beloved genius Mussolini—Finer himself knows, as it were in a flash, the real character and destiny of his hero. Somewhere in the midst of

amazingly contradictory eulogies he stops just a second, and murmurs the most penetrating psychological truth in all his ponderous book: "It is as though a tempest of resentment against the Universe itself were bursting in him."

Ataturk or Hitler, Lenin or Stalin, may coincide, for good or for bad, with Turkey or Germany, with the proletariat or Russia. No coincidence ties Mussolini to any section of the objective world. What he wanted was an opportunity to express his resentment "against the Universe itself." Neither the dream of human palingenesis nor the myth of the resurrection of Rome had played a role in his inner struggle. His choice was of weapons and accomplices, not of ideas and plans; it was a technical, not a spiritual one. The long perplexities that troubled him, even during the years of the Fascist rise, were of an instrumental, not of a moral nature. Now and again, especially in 1921, he was afraid of having made the wrong bet. Then he took leave of the past and went deliberately his new way.

He saw that Socialism might have been a companion and an accomplice in his march to his future, but it seemed too late, and he realized too that a companionship with fellow-men was subject to the chances of equality and mutual restraint. On the other side he saw that Nationalism was a horse to ride, a brutal force that could be brutally mastered.

He chose the horse.

Psychological determinism and external circumstances wove, to be sure, a web in which his will was enmeshed and his choice became almost necessary. But the small adverb *almost* suffices to identify, in the topography of spiritual happenings, that narrow strip of arbitrament, "between rock and wave," in which the freedom of the will ordinarily consists, and out of which the concept of moral liability grows. Necessity alone would not have been enough to shape his destiny, and together with it the destiny of many millions. A certain amount of undetermined decision was also required to that end, a quantum of free will, even if as trifling in itself as the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. Vol-

untarily he made the choice, taking the risks of egoistic greatness against those of mediocrity in collaboration, and killing whatever was left of his soul for the hope of a resurrection in sheer power.

## *The Hour of Decision*

UNDOUBTEDLY the risks that he was to run in the case of a defeat were slight as compared with the returns that he hoped from victory. His stake at the roulette of life did not face even chances. Already during Nitti's premiership it had been easy for women and journalists—the latter belonging to the liberal and Antifascist party!—after a few days or hours to obtain from the Premier's benevolent irony Mussolini's release from the prison where he had been locked up under the charge of armed conspiracy against the state. He knew also that the state was now entangled in too much complicity with him to strike a deadly blow. The fight would be conditioned by the precedents and be not at all a fight to the finish. The worst that he could expect was a disgraceful breakdown of his ambitions, and perhaps a few months in jail.

But such risks existed. And a revengeful uprising of the Reds, as an aftermath of a Fascist defeat, was, if not likely, at least theoretically possible. Seigniorial reaction had already prevailed in little Hungary, and d'Annunzio had wellnigh succeeded in tiny Fiume, but the Tsarist generals had succumbed in Russia and Siberia and it was apparently not safe to transplant the seeds of black barbarism in a large civilized country like Italy, where already Bolshevism had failed and the collective mind seemed to have

sobered through historical experience to a distaste for any kind of frenzy. There was at any rate an imaginative daring in supposing that new flesh could grow on the long-buried bones of ancient or Renaissance despotism and that the freak of individual tyranny might rise again, centuries after the English and French revolutions, in the heart of Europe.

It is not the task of the historian to deny the magnitude of this personality, but only to qualify it. There was a degree of magnitude in Mussolini's choice. When several years later he understood that a German writer was planning a biography of Lincoln rather than of him, he had acquired in his own way the right of exclaiming, as he contemptuously did: "Lincoln! That mediocre man!"

However, the acme of his personality was reached, never to be surpassed, in the impassioned outbursts in which he, careless about the consequences, avowed the real motives of his thought and action. This happened several times, but never so strikingly as in an editorial in the *Popolo d'Italia*.

"I start," said Mussolini, "from the individual and strike at the state. Down with the state in all its forms and incarnations! The state of yesterday, of today, and of tomorrow. The bourgeois state and the socialist state. In the gloom of today and the darkness of tomorrow the only faith which remains to us individualists destined to die is the at present absurd but ever-consoling religion of anarchy."

The date of this editorial is April 6, 1920. Fascism had been founded as early as March 1919; and Mussolini was its acknowledged Duce.

A passage quoted above showed Mussolini as a star witness in the trial of Fascism as a pretended defence of the state and the propertied classes against the impending menace of Bolshevism. This second passage shows Mussolini as a star witness against the legend of Mussolini's Fascism as a spiritual conversion from socialism to the religion of the nation and the state.

There had never been socialism and there never was nation-

alism in him. There was consistently the anarchist. But he finally realized that no anarchist can triumph over the state unless he captures it and becomes himself the state. This personal inspiration was the decisive element in the new history of Italy and the world.

## October 28

WE HAVE already referred to Finer's book, the most comprehensive and cautious among all those that have appeared on Fascism. Good will is his historic Muse, and his very hesitancies may prove helpful from the point of view of documentary information. The authority of his judgment is at times increased by the patience of his doubts. This is one of the concluding paragraphs in Finer's pages on the rise and triumph of Fascism:

"Was Fascism in Italy inevitable? It looks as though it were the product of an unbroken deterministic chain: economic contradictions, political confusion, parliamentary weakness. Trotsky would give little credit to the will and power of individuals. Yet Fascism seems to me to have been avoidable if Mussolini had not functioned as he did, to aggravate the economic tension, to make political confusion worse confounded, to enter Parliament only to overthrow it. His will to power, and the ruthlessness of its realization, alone made Fascism *inevitable*, even as it now continues to make it possible.

"Was Fascism a Revolution? I think it was not. . . ."

It was not. It was not even a March on Rome.

The events of 1922 have been fully and documentarily related.

by eyewitnesses like Lussu and by historians like Salvemini. The general objections of those who contend that historiography must and can be impartial, that there is such a thing as impartiality between good and evil, truth and lie, and that the language of the historian can and must be as green and even as a billiard cloth, have proved ineffective against the results of Antifascist historiographers. Perhaps they would have made a better show of dexterity if they had covered with a veneer of feigned aloofness the tough facts they had found out and were reporting: a criticism that more fittingly was brought home to gloomy, grinning Tacitus, and that nevertheless scarcely impaired his authority. But the general objections against the unmannerly style and passion of Antifascist historians never materialized in the specific evidence of their having forged a lie or artfully concealed a truth.

Indeed, if there are still a few people cleaving to the belief in Fascism as an Antibolshevist antidote or in Mussolini as a convert to the religion of the fatherland—which might be considered, in comparison with more definite facts, as optional and quasi-volatile matters of judgment—the fable of the March on Rome has not survived in any reasonable mind.

Fascism had grown up not only with the complicity of a section of the ruling classes but under the avowed protection of the military commands and of the liberal state. Ministers of war—even when the minister came from the democratic or Socialistic ranks and later on veiled in repentance his deed—had allowed Fascism to arm and directly supplied it with arms from the military depots. The leader of official liberalism, old Giolitti, had looked down on Fascism from the height of his stature and of his wisdom, half grandfatherly, half Mephistophelically, as on a natural outgrowth of the war era, not so thoroughly unpleasant to the sight, not so black as it liked to masquerade. Nay, he had honestly enough thought that Fascism might be used as an *instrumentum regni*, to teach a lesson to what was left of revolutionary Socialism and to scare it back into the fold of constitutional rule. Therefore, he thought, Fascism deserved a temporary encouragement. After



a few brawls and screams, Giolitti, like a Jupiter smiling after the thunders, would have headed again a stupendous majority, arching a liberal rainbow over the Parliament and the country, and contemplating the twin metamorphosis of the Reds into Palepinks and of the Blacks into Pearlgreys. It was, moreover, a current belief, even among sensible liberals, that liberty, a spear of Achilles, heals the wounds that it has itself inflicted. The experience of freedom had been in Italy too short, as compared with centuries of servitude. It had been also comparatively easy, and never too seriously challenged from the interior. The Risorgimento had been far more a struggle for national independence from the foreign power than a conflict of political theories within the nation itself. Hence the tendency of Italian liberalism to take the aspect rather of a miracle-working superstition than of a militant religion. Few if any had objections against the theory and practice that liberty must be liberal even toward those who want to kill liberty. Few if any had grown to understand the meaning of the stern dictum according to which the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. Free speech and free institutions were to them a family estate, legitimately bequeathed by Italian and European ancestors, and they would have preferred to believe in rivers streaming back to the mountains than in civilization starting a retrograde way. If the policy of *laissez-faire* had succeeded so splendidly, like the conjurer's trick, when the Reds, who meant revolution, had seized the factories, why not trust the same panacea now that the trouble came from the Blacks, who, far from being the state's enemies, were its foster-children or darling naughty boys?

Thus nurtured and complimented, or blandly scolded, the black-shirted boys had hunted the Reds in the squares of the cities and the markets of the villages. Every Sunday had seen a round of the game; neither had weekdays been necessarily a rest. The Reds were now the shattered bands of an army, if it ever had been an army, in full rout; they were the prey of anguish and fear; but the weaker their resistance the more ruthless the hunt. Firearms and cold iron had been equally good for the purpose;

but whenever its use was possible without the danger of meeting a more powerful weapon, the boys had liked their blackjacks, a means of impressing sound ideas on stubborn foreheads: too sorry if the skull of the Red, crashing under the blows, proved to be of a softer stuff than it had seemed.

They had stripped the peasant girls suspected of red inclinations, and painted nationally tricolour their lower rotundities. They had stormed and wrecked the workmen's and employees' co-operatives, this finest achievement of social civilization in pre-Fascist Italy, winning incidentally the support of a good many haberdashers, travelling salesmen, and pedlars. They had learned from d'Annunzio that "*la fiamma è bella*"—the flame is beautiful—and, hurling torches or pouring oil, had systematically burned Case del Popolo, Camere del Lavoro, and Socialist, as well as Christian-Democratic, dailies and weeklies. They had also imported from d'Annunzio's Fiume the novelty of castor oil: a beverage, occasionally mixed with benzine or iodine, which they administered in mammoth doses to obdurate opponents, thus purging them of wrong ideas. Their healthy laughter exulted at the forced but only too-well-deserved abjection of the sinners; they had the feeling, too, of having heightened, with a flavour of Renaissance hilariousness, the leaden taste of modern battle.

Such exploits had been watched complacently by the police, who delighted in the boys as in an auxiliary corps, and felt already strongly inclined to exchange the parts. The judges, already half-toadies, had acquitted or overlooked killers and incendiaries, discreetly instructed as they were to take into account the "national motives" of the offences; as to the castor-oil business, it was clear fun, not worth speaking of. The boys had overthrown and seized the Socialist municipalities—indeed, not with ballots but with bullets, or at least with brandished bludgeons and levelled guns—among them the most important of all, the City Hall in Milan. D'Annunzio, in his overmedalled military uniform, had delivered the speech from the balcony, and even the *Corriere della Sera*, the liberal and Antifascist organ, forgetful of its indignation over

the unlawful occupation of the factories by the workmen a couple of years earlier, cheered this time the national-minded unlawfulness and applauded the gang. A lawful or so-called "legalitarian" strike of the workmen had broken out shortly before in the summer of 1922, not with the purpose of starting a leftist or Communist revolution, but with the pious wish of urging the state to enforce its law against the only law-breaking party that was left in the country. The strike had collapsed of itself in a couple of days, owing to the well-known incompetence and irresoluteness of leaders and masses; whereupon the so-called liberals and the boys had fraternized in the squares, claiming and celebrating a crushing victory. Finally the boys had staged a dress rehearsal of mobilization, rushing from everywhere and mustering in Alto Adige or Italian Tirol, with the avowed plan of teaching a lesson both to the fretfulness of the German-speaking population and to the weakness of the Italian authorities, but with the obvious intention of testing the Government's resistance to the free motions of Mussolini's and the other chieftains' armies. There was none. The boys saw it through, and all the national-minded applauded.

This was the situation between state and Fascism on the eve of the March on Rome. But something was stirring in the rank and file of the liberal parties. Financially and economically the country was recovering at increasing speed, the budget was virtually settled, the wounds of war were closing and international peace was safe after the treaty with Yugoslavia and the retreat of d'Annunzio from Fiume; the menace of a red cataclysm in the interior had long vanished; and even a fair amount of revenge had been taken over the former Soviet-mongers. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the moment was nearing when the liberal state might stand on its feet and walk confidently again on the highroad of progress. Arrangements were being made, more or less secretly in the Roman lobbies and drawing rooms, to bring about an understanding among the middle parties and to reinstall, by means of a convenient ministerial shake-up, the full power of a middle governmental course: capable of merging in its justice

all extremes and of using its force both against the Reds, should they ever need it again, and against the Blacks, who needed it badly. The boys had done in plenty what had been expected from them. Now they could be honourably dismissed.

But that was just what they and their leader did not want. Not because things were growing worse in the nation at large, but because they were growing better and threatened to become altogether good, the March on Rome was decided upon. Its secret inspiration was: Now or never.

The bulk of the insurgent army was supposed to march in converging lines from the Centre and North. The general command was established in Perugia, north-east of Rome: more exactly, in a hotel overlooking sweet Umbria and in a lordly mansion spontaneously offered by a landed gentleman and sportsman who had happened to be the Undersecretary for Propaganda in the Orlando ministry. Among the self-appointed generals and quadrumvirs who had convened in the lovely hill-town, where Carducci half a century earlier had sung his *Canto dell' Amore*, a hymn to freedom, justice, and love, there were young chieftains, like Italo Balbo, who had proved their ability in setting a co-operative afire with their own hands or in managing, aim-consciously, a trigger: genuine men of action, remarkably different in temper from Mussolini, whose impulse to action was after all the steam desultorily spurting from an intellectual cauldron.

As for Mussolini himself, he did not quit his home, his office, his Milan. This seems to be an indelible trait in his nature: that while his imagination schemes in greatness, his character achieves in craft. His dreams are of a lion, his actions of a fox.

To be sure, the long adultery between "revolutionary" Fascism and the legitimate authorities of the state indicated that no real danger was impending over the leaders of the "revolution" and that the coup was sufficiently safe even in the case of a failure. It was, however, wiser to stay in Milan, where Mussolini felt like a friend in need surrounded by tested friends indeed. Moreover, the well-known Swiss border was only one hour's drive distant.

One evening during the short crisis Mussolini was arrested. This episode of the revolution immediately vanished from the knowledge of almost all, since of documentary reports there was none, and the authors and characters of the farce wanted to have it blotted out from their words and memory.

A number of blackshirts had settled, without meeting any resistance, in the barrack room of the Bersaglieri, in the centre of the city. Later, sparks of strife began sputtering in the crowded household; and it seemed possible that the fraternization of early hours might turn to a row between the intruding Fascists and the cock-feathered infantrymen of the regular army. Such a ticklish situation, with which he promptly became acquainted, was particularly distasteful to Mussolini, whose plans and hopes rested primarily on the miscegenation of government and revolution. Should the two elements break apart, should the firearms go off—and in a neuralgic spot like Milan at that—the crossing of the Swiss border might become a compelling alternative.

He took with him Aldo Finzi, one of his closest associates—whose name and personality, however, were totally to disappear a couple of years later as Finzi, having refused to play scapegoat in the Matteotti murder, chose rather involuntarily the obscurity of a rural retirement. With such companionship Mussolini left his quarters, and went unnoticed, late at night, to the disputed barrack room. There he parleyed with the officers both of the volunteers and of the regulars, trying to scheme a *modus vivendi* between Blacks and motleys; but at a turning point of the negotiations he thought fit to withdraw with Finzi into an empty room, there to discuss the matters with him leisurely. A regular officer happened to pass by. He saw the two confabulating, and saw also a key sticking in the half-open door. He drew the door to himself, turning the key. Thereupon he rang up the Command of the Army Corps of Milan, announcing in a matter-of-fact way that he had arrested “the chiefs of the insurrection.” The news was passed by the general in command, an undersized stuffed uniform, to the Prefetto or Governor of the province of Milan. The latter,

a sage with whiskers, answered over the telephone: "Are you crazy? I request you to put the prisoners at my disposal." Thus the prisoners were hurriedly driven to the Prefettura, there to be entertained with liquor and after a friendly chat to be bidden God-speed to their quarters.

Nobody can scientifically tell what would have happened if the state had offered armed resistance to the insurrection. Most opinions agree that the crackling of a few machine-guns and the whirring of fewer airplanes would have been enough to scatter the black swarms. At any rate, had they even proved able to overflow on Rome, their permanence there, where they were cordially loathed, would have been neither comfortable nor long, if only the government could retain control of the railways conveying supplies to an easily hungered throng of consumers.

It is true that while the mass of the regular army felt hostile or at least indifferent toward the insurgents, many officers and generals, keen on promotions and parades, dreaming of the thrills of a bigger and better war, or genuinely incensed by tribal fanaticism, looked tenderly on the boys and wished their victory. Some of these generals, with their divisions, happened to be placed at important strategic junctions; among them His Excellency Gonzaga in Florence. It is, however, doubtful if they would have gone so far as to forswear openly their oath of allegiance to the king, outdoing the abortive perjury of Admiral Millo during the Dalmatian crisis. The outcome was none too bright for the insurgents; and when the placards proclaiming under the king's seal and signature the state of siege were pasted on the street walls from the Alps to the seas, all law-abiding citizens expected an almost complete collapse of the adventure.

But the king rushed by train to Rome, sorry at heart for the unwelcome interruption of his usually longer vacation in the lovely pine woods of Tuscany, and met the Premier at the station, rather angrily. The latter's name was Facta, but people would call him by the nickname *Nutrofiducia*, because he liked quite often to aver that he "nursed faith" in his bosom and that, in spite

of the lingering strifes, common sense with peace and prosperity was around the corner.

This was the man entrusted with the title if not with the substance of the highest political authority: a Piedmontese of the middle class, a lawyer, one among hundreds in the liberal crowd of Giolitti, in whose behalf he wielded, so to speak, the power; a man middle-aged, middle-sized, nothing in whom exceeded the average except for a pair of surprisingly disproportionate moustaches, which on so bland a lip looked rather pathetic than martial. Mussolini, a few years later, was to make him a Senator; whereupon, although not immediately, he died. The obituary, soberly worded by the press of the regime, found many of the young generation wondering who the man had been.

On that October night, however, the king singled him out for a fit of temper, very unusual for him. Not that he liked the Fascists, whose submission he sincerely wanted; but he disliked almost equally the annoyance and the late hour at which he had been called to Rome. All decision, after a curt salute, was adjourned till the morning.

As for the king, his inner and outer life was an open secret, and the transparent clockwork of his motivations had seemed so far to conceal no spring for dramatic upturns. His subnormally small stature had impressed his moral character, from early adolescence onward, with the marks of discomfort and bitterness, and although not at all wicked or foolish he had learned from a physical inferiority, always present to his consciousness and to other people's eyes, an unforgettable lesson of diffidence and shyness. His appearance in a group, military or civil, was unavoidably awkward; there was no uniform which did not seem too large for him, and the heavily gallooned cap looked like a borrowed tiara on his head. Had he suffered only from such a personal drawback, added to the disturbances of the time, his task would have proved hardly gratifying. But he had been brought up, at that, as the only child of

than that, not so good, of Humbert the Good—and of an exceedingly significant queen, whose front-page popularity and literary vanity the scion could not like, being shaped by nature to anything but literature and rhetoric. This environment, or loneliness, had made his dryness drier; his education was strict, and the teacher particularly entrusted with the office of moulding his mind did not a single day neglect to inculcate in him the theory that a constitutional monarch has nothing to do but obey and express the will of the people and the Parliament: in shorter words, that he has nothing to do. His father, King Humbert, after a mildly reactionary attempt into which he had been dragged almost unawares, died of an anarchist's bullet: a lesson more eloquent to young Victor Emmanuel than all the hours he had spent with his teacher of constitutional law.

He did not love the crown; he submitted to it. Whenever he was allowed, he retired into the woods of Piedmont or Tuscany, there to enjoy the simple pleasures of family life. Even when inescapably in Rome he lingered as little as possible in the city palace, for the rest of the time preferring a more modest suburban residence. He did not covet triumphal arches, women, glory; and since he could not have competed anyway with his imperial cousin, William II, he liked better to be different, as the wise violet who does not emulate the conspicuous poppy. He never spoke in public unless the Premier, every second or third year, handed him a paper to have it delivered by the regal voice before the assembled Parliament at the opening of the session. His leisure was spent in the most harmless of hobbies, namely, numismatics, or systematic collection of old coins, to which must be added a no less systematic accumulation of contemporary currencies and well-managed savings both in Italy and abroad; since, without being a Harpagon, he did not follow in the steps of his profligate and brave ancestors, and all his virtues were of the domestic type. Because he took no inspiration from a religious belief and gathered no reward in a metaphysical enthusiasm, those virtues seemed more laudable to the middle classes of the positivistic era. His frame of mind was



sceptical, and yet his daily routine was blameless. A good husband, a loving and assiduous father, a conscientious bureaucrat, he embodied the ideals—especially tidiness, thrift, and modesty—of the Italian bourgeois of his generation, on a throne, indeed, too high for his legs. But even his unconquerable tic of restlessly twitching his cheek from the corner of the eye to the chin, as though he were always chewing gum mixed with gravel, brought him, stripped of all external majesty, nearer to the commoner, who felt beneath him in a world of symbols but compensatively above him in one of physical realities. When, a few years before the Great War, a crank tried to assassinate this innocuous king, an old joke was groomed anew, which the king's father, Humbert, had squeezed from his unproductive brain on a similar occasion. "These are," Humbert had said, addressing the people in the square under his palace after an unsuccessful attempt at his life, "the hazards of the job." Now the stale joke was applied by journalists and courtiers to the heir, whose Corona Ferrea, or iron crown, was made more comfortable with the wool of humility. The crank was not executed; written and unwritten law in Italy execrated death and blood; and the poor witticism, by which a monarchy had degraded its mission to the rank of a trade or employment, aroused again a wave of complacent laughter on whose crest all subjects were lifted to the moderate level of the king's breast.

The outbreak of the World War, with the unavoidable intervention of Italy, was a hard blow to this tame ideal of majesty. For one thing, this king did not care for glory and power; nothing was more alien to his mind than the bloodthirsty glamour of d'Annunzio's poems and speeches. He would have liked instead to deserve the title of "Honest King," or "*Re Galantuomo*," that glib courtiers, echoed by a conventional popular consent, had conferred on his grandfather, Victor Emmanuel II, the unifier of Italy. And now the chain of necessity and the pressure from below compelled him to disavow his own signature and to scrap the Triple Alliance which made him an ally of Germany and Aus-

tria. However justifiable from a diplomatic and even a moral point of view, it was or seemed to be a breach of contract; his imperial cousin, Wilhelm II, branded him, with revengeful contempt, as the "traitor king." Silently, and more or less secretly, the king went through a nervous breakdown, during which he was under treatment by a well-known specialist. He recovered; victory came as a gift of the gods. At the end of the war he could think, altogether grey-haired and grey-moustached although not yet in his fifties, of starting again his ordinary life, with his seasons divided between the valleys of Piedmont, the shores of Tuscany, and, as long as it went on, the pine trees on the border of the Roman Campagna, with his daily schedule suitably balanced between the signing business of the constitutional monarch and the sapient leisure of the numismatist, but, in truth, with the real fibres of his heart wholly devoted to the task he really loved. It was not the task of shooting predestined gemsboks, neither was it the purpose of strutting, on ideal stilts, before clanking armies or cheering crowds: vanities of vanities which he inwardly minimized, in the spirit, say, of Ecclesiastes. His nearest *next* was what he really loved; the task which really absorbed him was that of head of the family: of a family, now, whose hereditary estate had increased through a trial by combat as perilous and fortunate as it had been unexpected and dreaded.

His meals, both *domi militiaeque*, at the headquarters of the fighting army, and in the Roman palace, were famed for their frugality. His talk was easily predictable on many occasions, because of the objective, nay, arithmetical soberness of his curiosity, seldom soaring above the safe whereabouts of statistical and bureaucratic information. Stopping in Siena he would ask how many persons could stay in the Campo, or central square of the city; entering an exhibit of art, he would equally inquire how many paintings were on display. His wife—the daughter of a Balkan princelet, half-robber-baron, half-bard, later promoted to the rank of king only to see all his kingdom, a village on a mountain, engulfed in the earthquake of war and peace—was easily the worst

dressed lady of Italy, and never mixed with either nation or society, as inarticulate in Italian as in the other languages she had learned, a protégée country girl, at the Russian court. She submitted, however, very dutifully to the drudgery of social work, compulsory in the royal families of the democratic era, and when visiting a hospital she would drop gold coins into the hands of children dying of meningitis. Otherwise her mind and heart, like her husband's, were altogether in the household, or households. She would ship to her sire, at least as long as they could be lit again in another kingly mansion, boxes of half-burned candles from the soirees of the Quirinal, and discards from her wardrobe to her lovely sisters, who certainly knew better how to fit mauve with crimson, lace with fur. Four girls had been born of her and Victor Emmanuel's marriage: a fourfold problem, owing to the disturbed conditions in dynastic and confessional Europe, which made four good marriages in one royal Catholic family rather unlikely. The only son, Crown Prince Humbert—whom later the Fascists wanted to be called, more simply and noncommittally, Prince of Piedmont—was a handsome boy of decidedly Slavic features, with soft eyes and lips. He was very fussy about his nobility of blood, taking, however, more stock in the small percentage of Habsburg corpuscles he carried in his veins than in all the thousand-year-old Savoy lineage. It was perhaps this Viennese inclination that made him so fond of musical comedies. He would read the libretto carefully before the performance; and during it, in the purple penumbra of the royal box in a Turin theatre, would consult time and again a significant passage while listening to the music.

But his father loved him, although not without criticism. The common talk that the king was a republican at heart and would have liked to change crown and képi for a simple felt was perhaps silly, but it contained, as often legends do, a quantum of truth. What he thoroughly disliked was the idea that his son might be dispossessed of the job; perhaps realizing in his subconscious that the young man could never possibly fit in any other employment.

Margaret, the dowager queen, now dead, had frowned on the democracy and mediocrity of her son; she had turned Fascist, transferring her unwithered smile that had caught in its net Carducci, the republican poet of unkempt head, to beetle-browed law-breakers whom she wanted to support and to bring up as supporters of throne and altar. Now that she had gone, whatever was left of royalty in the full meaning of the word pertained exclusively to the cadet branch of the dynasty: the Aostas, ageing sons of the late Amadeus of Savoy, who had been for a short season, fifty years earlier, king in Spain. Not all of them had been able to forget about this deceptive glimpse of greatness and *châteaux d'Espagne* in their family history—as it were, through the slit of a curtain—neither were they wealthy or otherwise lucky enough. The best of the brothers, the Duke of the Abruzzi, a noted explorer and scientist whose personal happiness had faded away in a frustrated romance with an American beauty, kept practically out of politics, and bore in dignified silence the humiliation of having been deprived, soon after the start of the war, of the command of the navy. But the Count of Turin, another bachelor, who in his best years had been a gallant horseman and fencer and had established the use of the rolling *r* in the Italian cavalry, spoke almost loudly in the Milanese drawing rooms with derogatory remarks about his “royal cousin.” As for the eldest brother, the Duke of Aosta, he had been the leader of the unbeaten third army on the eastern front. Now rumour had him selling piece-meal, through a back door, several antiques from his palace to patch up the holes of the ducal budget. In contrast to the crown prince he preferred the opera to the operetta; and while dozing off behind the railing of his box, he was likely to dream of a switch in the succession to the Italian throne and of a subsequent Paneuropean restoration of the legitimate monarchies, in the pageantry of a Holy Alliance, according to the half-hidden plans of the French Orleans lady whom he had wedded and by whom he had begotten promising offspring more worthy of a crown than the soft heir of the older branch who was going to usurp it.

All such naps and dreams, and nods or even Roman salutes of his relatives to the Fascist party, could pass unnoticed by the king as far as he was personally concerned. But he could not help feeling deep solicitude as to the insidious menace to his son's future that was implied in these attitudes of his relatives as well as of several generals and admirals. He knew that Mussolini, a former apologist of regicide, now had in his sleeve, almost visibly if not quite openly, the trump of a forced abdication of the king—which might have been not so bad—and of a shift of the Aostas to the throne—which was unbearable. He was sceptical as a king, but orthodox as a father. The consideration, together with the frank advices and the implicit threats of admirals and generals, weighed heavily on his decision.

But almost no less heavily than the dynastic orthodoxy of the father weighed, strange as it may sound, the orthodoxy of the constitutional monarch, as he chose to interpret it at that moment. His great-grandfather had been branded as a traitor because, in the wake of European reaction, he had hastily abandoned the liberal ideals, hastily embraced in a moment of careless enthusiasm. His grandfather, the conqueror of Italy, had been named the "honest king" because he was supposed, however erroneously, to have firmly withstood the temptation of scrapping the constitution again. His father, having walked on the verge of unconstitutional dictatorship, had died of an avenger's bullet. These lessons had been taken seriously by the descendant; he wanted to be and to remain an irreprehensibly constitutional king. The motto, "I am their chief; therefore I must follow them," was indelibly carved around the compass of his inward determination. In all likelihood his genuine opinions were those of a pupil of Giolitti, a kind of moderate liberalism; but when the nation seemed to go Socialist he did not shy, and conversed with Bissolati as with a friend. He would have followed, immovably centred on the movable will of his people, any other course, faithfully floating on the changing wave.

Now it was questionable if the nation had gone Fascist. But a

considerable mass of it behaved as if it had; and Fascism, nursed by the state and the army, was now a grown-up force to be taken into account. The state of siege, with the military repression thereto connected, belonged, technically at least, to the methods of absolute monarchy which his father had so unsuccessfully tried; apart from the consideration, not easily slighted by a humanitarian and pacifist, that enough blood had been shed in wars and civil strife. To be sure, Fascism was anti-constitutional in its drive; and positively, or virtually, opposed freedom and human rights. But, for one thing, the king listened to those liberals who thought that, once put in the saddle of government and called to share in its responsibilities and benefits, Mussolini and his Rases, as they were called, would have merged into the all-harmonizing complexity of the liberal state; and for the rest, his deeply disillusioned conscience whispered to him that, if the majority of the people comes to dislike the constitution, it may be the duty of a constitutional king to throw the constitution overboard, and that, as no Catholic is allowed to be more papist than the Pope, no king either should insist on being more democratic than his demos.

Thus a sophistical distortion of the constitutional spirit wrecked constitution and freedom in Italy, setting an example for the Germany of Hindenburg and Hitler ten years later to follow; and under a Pharisaic pretence of fidelity to the oath of fidelity that he had sworn to his people when ascending the throne the honest king became a perjurer.

He repented the decree of the state of siege that had been published not without his consent, and on the morning after his arrival in Rome he surrendered his people and himself.

The council of ministers, that had sat until dawn, had been rather confused, but had ended agreeing on a resolution of resistance. The intransigents were headed by Giovanni Amendola, a young neo-Kantian philosopher and statesman, who was to die, three years later, of Fascist wounds. All ministers had agreed that a deputation of them should go to the king; but at the last moment Facta managed in one way or another to persuade his col-

leagues that it was wiser if he went alone. They did not suspect him.

Nobody witnessed the colloquy between king and Premier. It is common surmise that the latter volunteered to interpret the king's desire, and suggested the withdrawal of the state of siege; and that the king gave in without any struggle. The decree was torn off the walls. Blackshirts, on the squares and trains, hailed "Victor Emmanuel, the Fascist king."

While all sorts of rumours flashed wildly over the country, an abortive deed was schemed in Rome. The plan of king and conservatives was to build a ministry of coalition and peace, with Salandra, an elderly tory from the South, at its head, and an adequate share to Mussolini and his party. The Duce of Fascism, still abiding in Milan, was bidden to Rome for constitutional consultation with the king.

But now, for the first time in his life, he had known the taste of gain by bluff, of victory by threat. He repeated the stroke, which he was to repeat so many times in the years following. He declared unswervingly that he would not go to Rome, neither would he demobilize his army, unless the king pledged himself to entrust him with the premiership.

This was unconstitutional, unmistakably. The king wavered.

In the perplexity of the hour a group of personalities of the conservative and liberal parties gathered around the Prefect in the gubernatorial palace at Milan. It was one of them, otherwise a staunch liberal, who accepted the distasteful task of telephoning in behalf of all the others to the aide-de-camp of the king in Rome that, affairs being in such a plight, it was advisable for His Majesty to yield to Mussolini's request.

Thus advised and supported by his constitutionalists, the king waived his tardy scruples and signed the telegram calling Mussolini to the office of Premier and to the composition of the Cabinet. And thus a man who had been born a king sealed half-unwittingly the sentence that made him a slave.

The March on Rome, as is now well known to everybody,

happened in a sleeping car, although certainly the leader did not sleep all through the night. He composed his ministry, almost completely. For the Department of Education he would have liked Croce, but there were difficulties. A young politician, tinged with philosophy, who was travelling in Mussolini's retinue suggested Gentile, a close friend to Croce and next to him the most significant personality in neo-idealistic philosophy. Mussolini wrote down the name.

As Finer puts it, "Mussolini crossed the Rubicon in the Milan-Rome *wagon-lit* and a bowler hat. The latter was shortly after replaced by the traditional silk-topper." There was, however, an interlude. Landing in Rome he donned a fresh black shirt and rushed in this attire to the Quirinal. The king, who in the past had unceremoniously welcomed the Socialist Bissolati in his tweeds, no less unceremoniously welcomed now the Fascist in his shirt sleeves. Said the Duce to the king: "Majesty, I bring you back the Italy of Vittorio Veneto," meaning the Italy of war and triumph.

Blackshirts by the thousands now swarmed in through the gates of Rome—which had no gates at all. After a few days they, wine and dined, obeyed the orders of their chief and swarmed out. Mussolini found himself sitting at a large desk.

Great names, from Machiavelli to Nietzsche, from Cæsar to Napoleon, had loomed over the spiritual origins of Fascism. But the March on Rome and the technique of the coup d'état had more modest precedents. Without reaching so far back as Theodore von Neuhof, king of Corsica in a jolly moment of the eighteenth century, there had been, on the eve of the World War, the Captain of Köpenick, the cobbler who, using as his only weapon the suggestion emanating from a stolen Prussian uniform, had conquered and ruled if not Prussia at least a Prussian village in the outskirts of Berlin.



## *The Call of Mediocrity*

ROME, however, was no Köpenick, and the conquerors were confronted with problems less frivolous than the military shame of their conquest.

Besides the inspiring scenery of ruins and vistas there were in the eternal city several things alive in their own way. There was the Roman Church, the shrewdest and most persevering of all political institutions in the old world, unconquerably emerging across centuries of humiliations and losses. There was a dynasty of newcomers, to be sure, or even upstarts as rulers of a large country, but widely rooted in the feelings of the army and not unpopular in many strata of the masses. There was also a Parliament, neither more nor less discredited than most Parliaments at that time in continental Europe, but identified, even if only in the shape of a chronic sickness, with national life, and pivotal in a constitution to which three kings had sworn allegiance and in which three generations of the ruling classes had been educated since the earliest childhood.

The anarchist, the Superman, the conqueror to his heart's content, should have done away with these remnants of a sorry past and lifted all crowns on his head, above all law. Whether, in the wake of his stunning but easily explainable success, he might have been able to align his blackshirts against the dynasty, the princes of the Church, the captains of industry, and the generals and admirals who had flung open to him and them the gates of Rome; whether, invited like a Trojan horse into the citadel, he with his squads might have found the power of jumping victoriously on their hosts, thus performing after a tame coup d'état a real revolution, his revolution—these are queries that do not find

a reasonable answer in a record of what really happened. The only safe assumption, verified by the constant diagram of his career, is that his character, both as moulded by inborn dispositions and as bent by the failures of his revolutionary youth, had learned early to dislike any kind of gambling unless he felt that the supply of cards in his sleeve was sufficient to even the odds of fortune. In the present case a gamble against all permanent forces housing in Rome ought to have been played with most trumps on the table. He turned his eyes away.

To this consideration must be added the influence often exerted by the Roman climate on heroes and would-be heroes as soon as they reached the grey-brown circuit of the Roman walls. It often seemed as if the role ascribed by ancient historians to the air of Capua, in whose breath Hannibal's virtue had softened, had passed to the once conquering city. In the popular opinion this meant actually the physical climate, with its sirocco or south-east wind roaming low on the exhausted earth and conducive to dangling arms and protracted siestas; then, when this withdrew, the pastoral west breeze of the afternoons, proper for careless talk or stroll. It meant the churches and sacred crypts, used in the hot hours as free summer resorts; the bowers on the hills with their amiably treacherous white wine; the profane incense steaming invisibly from the pine groves to the indubitable paradise of an October sky; and in this unique setting, the girls and men, usually handsome, but rotund and relaxed since their early youth. Hence probably came the particular accent to the Roman dialect: a secondary branch of the Tuscan linguistic family, soaked in a fatter cadence reminiscent of the nearing South, although still enlivened with a bitterish tang in which philosophical irony was more recognizable than light humour. When modern Romans, affectionately and knowingly, talked of their "eternal" city, the very tempo of their speech signified the imperturbable ease and Olympian calm of the Roman atmosphere assuaging all novelty and merging all contrast.

But Curius Dentatus and Cato the Elder, the Decii and the

Bruti, had been born in approximately the same climate; neither was all Roman medieval history summarized in the crass catastrophe of a Cola di Rienzo. That very same air had vibrated with the stern sounds of archaic Latin; and it was the spiritual climate, not the natural, that had really changed, until it lay like a shroud of perfumed malaria over the indolence of the city and the Campagna. Syncretism—which is the second name of Rome—had made the change: that is, the Roman endeavour toward a unity of civilization and mankind, in its vicissitude of triumph and defeat. At first the attempt was successful, and found its expression in the religious enthusiasm of a Virgil or Livy; later on, frustrated by the centrifugal forces which drove medieval and modern history, this enthusiasm boiled down to a universal scepticism that accepted all things and believed in none.

The navel of Rome was somewhere in the lowland between the hills and the Tiber: the imperial Pantheon, supposedly allegorizing Romanity as universal syncretism and sheltering under its dome, as impartial as a sky, all gods of antiquity and all martyrs of Christianity. When the later Emperors made up for the mistake—to be sure, unavoidable—of the earlier ones who had refused admittance to the Jewish God-man, they gave birth to a being of most surprising vitality and destiny: Roman Catholicism, the heir apparent to both dying religions of antiquity, to Paganism and Christianity as well. But in so far as it was Roman, Catholicism was to be a Lackland and Land-Hungerer always. Its ambition of probating the will of Antiquity and appropriating at least the territories of the Roman Empire in a sacro-profane hierarchy of Heaven and Earth was foiled by barbarians, burghers, and kings, to materialize finally in the lamentable shape of the Papal State: a stump or abortion of history, whose positive result consisted alone in the negative effect of its lying across the peninsula, keeping North and South apart, and preventing the Italians from joining in the pattern of national unity that was the social and biological law of the modern era. On the other hand, as far as this rickety body was full of a world-commanding pagan-

Christian soul, the catholicity of Catholicism was successively curtailed by Islam, schism, heresy, Renaissance, Protestantism, and liberalism; until the inadequacy of its real power to the unbending pretence of universal Romanity became, consciously or not, the inspiration of popular wit. Since the days of the Renaissance a mutilated statue between Pantheon and Tiber, the so-called Pasquino, had regularly affixed on it rhymed lampoons, no less anti-popish than Luther's indictments but not purposing revolt, and vanishing day after day in the mellowness of Roman air: this new kind of universal syncretism. The Popes more or less delighted in the jokes, and carried on.

It was Europe and liberalism, a product of Renaissance and Protestantism, that conquered Rome and Catholicism when a few Italian Bersaglieri and artillerists, in 1870, opened a gap in the sacred walls. The ideal proportions of the antagonists, Tradition and Innovation, Authority and Criticism, were tragic; but no tragedy was played. A miracle happened, if such are miracles. For fifty years the two opposite principles dwelt on two opposite hills, officially ignoring or condemning each other but in fact exchanging Augurs' winks across the benevolent valley. The city was not half so large as a modern metropolis, and its population reached a modest fraction of the figures of London or New York; yet in the grandeur that was Rome there was room for a Quirinal and a Vatican, a Chamber of Deputies, a Senate, the Great Orient of Freemasonry, the Holy Congregation or Inquisition, a dozen or more democratic ministerial offices, the white statues of the gods and saints, and the bronze monument to the burned heresiarch Giordano Bruno, flown over by loving doves and cheered by the shrill chatter of Jewish haberdashers. The fountains made a symphony of it all.

Now there seemed to be no reason why a place in the orchestra should not be made for the newcomers, Fascism and Dictatorship, who had entered Rome far more peacefully and bureaucratically than liberalism and democratic monarchy had done fifty-two years earlier. There had been no schism or persecution in 1870; there

needed to be no subversion or upheaval in 1922, since all roads led to Rome and the indolence of Rome had arms so wide that she embraced, in an impartial slumber, whosoever and whatsoever came to her. As there had been no March on Rome, so there was no revolution. Mussolini cracked his whip before the Parliament, which winced like a chastised dog; but he did not dissolve it; neither were its constitutional privileges formally impaired. He chose a place for himself somewhere between Quirinal and Vatican: at first in Palazzo Chigi in the very neighbourhood of the Chamber of Deputies, later in Palazzo Venezia, a few hundred yards down, under the shadow of the Capitol and on the main artery connecting the royal seat with the Holy See. He kept on excellent terms with both Monarchy and Church, and even the institutions of liberalism and democracy were numbed, but not killed. A similar numbness had appeared at other times during the short history of united Italy: for instance, with the half-dictatorship of Crispi and with the half-military rule of General Pelloux in the eighties and nineties. It might come true that Fascism also was a halfness and that this third relapse of Italian freedom into a state of debility was another benign drowsiness and no death-spelling dusk. The distinctive features of the new episode, particularly the Nietzsche-d'Annunzio rhetoric inflating the cheeks of leader and heralds, and the daggers and belts, the fezzes and black shirts outraging a civilized sky, were perhaps more apt to mortify a sensitive imagination than to frighten a reasonable mind. The most daring optimism seemed confirmed by the wisdom of Time and its never-ending March on Rome, and it was not absurd to suppose that once in the eternal city Fascism and Mussolini might adopt the time-honoured habit of the beauty sleep in the Roman afternoons.

In the wake of world post-war prosperity and partly at least as a result of the efforts of the preceding governments, the budget was balancing, trade was picking up, and a breeze of economic revival breathed over the poor country. It was natural, although superficial, to credit the Fascist or half-Fascist regime—since it

was a cabinet of coalition under the premiership of Mussolini—with such results or hopes. Political brigandage, assassinations and arsons, castor oil and mangonel (the slang term for bludgeon), had not ceased; but it was admissible to suppose that they were an aftermath, a foam of a receding tide; and it seemed honest to acknowledge that, although the government often neglected to prosecute the evildoers, neither did it encourage them officially. The most fateful measure adopted by the new government at its start was the dissolution of the anarchical gangs, the so-called “Fascist squads of action,” and by the same stroke of pen, the reorganization of their members into a regular black-shirted and fezzed army, the so-called “Voluntary Militia for National Security,” whose oath of allegiance pledged it not to the king but to Mussolini as Duce or Leader of the Fascist revolution. We have now documentary evidence that when Mussolini snatched the king’s signature to this decree he was fully aware of having definitely killed the power and prestige of the monarchy, and uttered in obscenely colourful words his pride over the deed. But such evidence at that time was withheld from the people; and it was allowable to think that the suppression of the squads was in itself a good thing indeed, and that the constitution of a regular black army, subject to discipline and law, was a step toward normality, meant to prepare the circumstances in which the volunteer formations should be absorbed in the regular army and Fascism in the nation. Mussolini himself, with his winged words, “The faction may perish, that the nation may live,” authorized the belief.

Another far-going measure almost no less fateful was the suppression of the Nationalist party and of its small-sized blue-shirted private army. Both were taken wholesale into the Fascist army and party, which added an initial to its symbol and became the P.N.F., or National-Fascist party. The consequence was that the Nationalists, fewer in number, but better equipped in mental will—several of them provided with university degrees, many of them apparelled with a perverted but unwavering culture—

spread their contagion into the rank and file of Fascism and completed the stage metamorphosis of Mussolini from the Romagna tribune to the Roman Emperor, or Cola di Rienzo. They panached his cap and furnished his brain. Unswervingly and with more than Dominican intransigence they supported Monarchy, Absolutism, Capitalism (even if its social counterpart should be land- and factory-serfdom), Church—their Catholic Church, not a bit Christian, thoroughly unapostolic, but altogether Roman and conquering: a sacrosanct embodiment of more than Machiavellian atheism—nay, even Neo-Classicism did they support; or, briefly, there was no grave on which they did not mount guard. One of them wrote confidently: "Never shall Italy furl the banner of reaction." Under these suggestions the glimmer that still reminded Fascism of its plebeian and insurrectional sources died out, and all the confused possibilities of the magma coalesced into one fixity. But few at that time were able to realize the necessity of this unfolding, while many were lulled by the hope that Fascism, however unaccountable and raw, might engulf in its vital swing that tragic idiocy, Nationalism.

Already the petty bourgeois and his wife, pushing the baby carriage in the park, could enjoy their Sunday afternoons in a fairly sensible expectation that the crepitation of machine-guns and the boom of hand grenades would not add an unwelcome counterpoint to the familiar harmonies of the brass band. Already the wise, the patient, could point to the prospect that Fascism might turn into something reasonable and usual—a thing like many others—its native hue fading under the pale cast of ordinary administration. When blood or castor oil ran, a strictly guarded press hushed the moans and yells of victims and torturers alike; and perhaps it was true that the wave of violence was slowly yet steadily subsiding behind the screen that hid it from most eyes and bore for everybody the promise of better days. Several, though unbendingly Antifascists at heart, went so far as to find a blame in those liberals who after having coached Fascism, the vindicator of order and bourgeoisie, to victory and conquest, now

pricked it with the pins of an opposition both exasperating and inconclusive, instead of helping their hero of the day before, at least in silent watchfulness, along his slope to mediocrity and nil.

The twenty-six months between the trip to Rome and the proclamation of dictatorship—October 28, 1922 and January 3, 1925—were the obscurest in Mussolini's career. If ever a man felt inwardly split, with two souls abiding in one breast, this man was he. For over two years history held the scales, with two equal possibilities.

A small philosopher has written that Rome is the city where the small feels great and the great feels small. If it is accurate that Mussolini felt sometimes helpless in Rome, this may be taken as an index of his comparative greatness. The philtre of the atmosphere seemed to work on him, as if he were not insensitive to the suggestion of that very architecture, bulging in a pregnancy which for about four centuries had been sterility-stricken. His egotism-anarchism, perhaps, was bending toward the other forces which built the complex vault of Roman authority: a pillar near other pillars, supporting and supported: at any rate limited and static. From time to time it might even seem as if he was learning to like his country and to talk of Italy as a son does of his mother and not as a plunderer does of his prey.

From time to time the Roman salute would spring an olive twig, inviting other parties, including Socialism. The idea was politically sound and his voice rang honest when, in a buoyantly applauded Parliamentary speech, he contended that three great parties, Fascism, Catholicism, and Socialism, expressed the popular soul of Italy and that the safety of Italy rested on the confident collaboration of all three.

Certainly he would have preferred to reach his goal in the international field, to bestow glory on himself and Italy, which was the irreplaceable instrument of his ambition, through victory in war or at least in diplomacy, and to obtain absolute power at home from the admiration and gratitude of the people rather



than from the combined system of his fear and the fears of millions. Empire with its radiancy was more worth while than sheer tyranny with its gloom.

Soon after the March on Rome he left for Geneva. But there was no March on Geneva.

The plan, rather puerile or at least premature, of testing on French and British statesmen the method that had proved so successful with the midget king of Italy, was met by their superior derisive courtesy. He stopped en route, declaring that he did not care to proceed further unless the claims of Italy, colonial and others, were first recognized; only to be told that such claims, however worth considering in themselves, were not on the schedule of the impending meeting at Geneva.

## March on Corfu

ON HIS way back from Geneva to Rome he lingered in Milan. There, among other things, he wanted to see this writer.

He had scarcely met him before. From the columns of his *Popolo d'Italia* he had consistently, although more or less anonymously, stoned him as a defeatist and traitor on account of the Mazzinian-Wilsonian politics which that writer embodied in a progressive daily and otherwise. Three months before the March on Rome the Fascist gangs, waving their bludgeons and easily overpowering the meek resistance of the police, had expelled the writer from Venice, the Holy Adriatic City, where he had been

invited for a literary lecture but where all the national-minded hated to see the man who had helped surrender Roman and Venetian Dalmatia to the Yugoslav pack.

Now Mussolini wanted to see him. He most firmly declared that collaboration was his goal within the country, and peace abroad with everybody, but especially with Yugoslavia. The war hysteria of d'Annunzio and d'Annunzio's acolytes left him unmoved in his purpose. If the Yugoslavs—said he—consented to add one Dalmatian island, just one, to the territory assigned to Italy by the treaty of peace, he was ready to ratify single-handed, without even asking the Parliament, such political and commercial agreements between the two states as had been drafted to perfect the peace in the spring of 1922 but still lay in abeyance, owing to the obstructionism of both Yugoslav and Italian nationalists.

The writer had no island in his pocket. Nor was Yugoslavia anxious to spare one, just one, for the sake of Mussolini's prestige.

It did not, however, come to any break. The negotiations between the two countries went on, as slowly and perseveringly as they had before.

One of the forces of inertia which Fascism had found in Rome and in whose combined embrace it seemed fated to repose, inhabited the Consulta, quaint baroque palace near the Quirinal. There, in the long afternoons—since work did not begin before lunch—was busy the staff of the Foreign Office: a well-groomed bureaucracy drafted from the upper set of the bourgeoisie and from the nobility. On the whole, they had good training and better manners. Their nationalism, if any, was not yet at odds with old-fashioned, decent patriotism. They had carried to the entrance examinations a considerable knowledge of law, history, economics, and languages, and in the course of their careers, while not forgetting altogether the three former, they had used the opportunity of improving the latter. The suggestions of the Blacks were offset in their minds by fine education, by social experience at home and abroad, sometimes perhaps by the allaying influence of a foreign friend or a foreign wife.

They decoded telegrams, they pasted clippings, they conversed with visitors, they hastened, yet without losing their composure, to the call of the minister. When in his presence, they knew very well how not to smile if His Excellency happened to read French aloud, and abstained also, if the circumstances allowed it, from emending his occasional misstatements in chronology and geography.

The motions of their minds were circumspect but safe; nor were all of them necessarily and all the time behind the times. It even occurred that a group of them, ambassadors and high officials, sided with the Western Powers and Russia against Austria and Germany at the start of the World War. Secretly but actively they spurred or at least encouraged the responsible statesmen to the declaration of neutrality, to the scrapping of the Triple Alliance, to intervention on the other side. Later they shook their heads at the hopeless Machiavellism of Sonnino, and grumbled and whispered among themselves, calling for a different policy which should be more straightforward and more sensible, more honourable and more profitable at once. It was, to be sure, an opposition of mere grumbles and whispers, only exceptionally rising to a readily discarded plan of action; discipline and routine crippled almost wholly its efficiency. They had at any rate the comfort of saying, when things turned out badly, *I told you so*; and the youngsters in the rank and file of the Foreign Office admired the dissenters, perhaps as daredevils and radicals, certainly as geniuses.

Sforza, the minister who in 1920 brought about the peace treaty with Yugoslavia and the collapse of d'Annunzio, was a colleague of those people. He came from the ranks of professional diplomacy. His manners were excellent, his French sounded adequate, his English more than plausible; with history and geography he was unusually conversant. Because he looked different from such gesticulating Parliamentarians or deaf-mute robots as had hung their hats in the Consulta for a short ministerial period, because he was one of themselves, with a better gleam in his eyes,

they liked him; and he was able, with the help of others, to mould many diplomatic heads into a kind of Mazzinian-Wilsonian ideology which they conveniently translated into the acceptable terminology of national interests and clever bargains.

Ministers came and went, and so did Sforza; but bureaucracy remained, with the Secretary General of the Foreign Office often acting in the shadow as the real minister when nominal ministers came and went too fast. The progressive group had now the upper hand in the Consulta; Contarini, a friend of Sforza, was Secretary General and wielded the real power.

However, they did not dislike Mussolini when he seated himself in the ministerial armchair, although their friend Sforza, at that time ambassador in Paris, resigned immediately thereupon, unconventionally slamming the door. They certainly preferred to see the new Excellency in his picturesque military accoutrements rather than in top hat, still shaky on his unaccustomed forehead. But they could not help appreciating Mussolini in his new role as protector of property and order, as restorer of national and moral law. They all had stock and land, and their wives and mistresses went to church. Perhaps Sforza's walkout had been impulsive and harmful.

That the words of Mussolini and Mussolini's chieftains in foreign policy were too many and too loud was patent. But they were words. Good diplomats at the Consulta felt sure that time and training, and advancement in manners under their supervision, would strip the words of all danger, leaving just that zest for aggressive rhetoric that may prove usable, from time to time, in the competition of nations. For a considerable time Contarini was still the real minister. Whilst Mussolini sat at the helm, eloquently handling the wheel, he, the swarthy Sicilian Secretary, as involved and almost inarticulate in speech as he seemed to be skilled in action and self-confident in the long-headed sagacity of his purpose, stood behind the orator, within easy reach of the latter's elbow. His and his colleagues' opinion—which he appar-

ently expressed as best he could to Mussolini himself—was that Fascism was a nigh perfect thing, as far as domestic and economic policy was concerned, provided that a false step in foreign policy did not make it go to pieces. He and they took to themselves the task of seeing to it that such a mishap should not happen.

But few if any know whether it was by chance or by design that Contarini, in the early autumn of 1923, at last left the Foreign Office for a long-postponed vacation. During his absence Mussolini waged his first imperial war. It was to be, as usual, a safe one, if only the prospective opponents complied by keeping quiet.

An Italian general, Tellini, was mysteriously slain in a border-zone between Albania and Greece: a murder to which nobody, then or later, found the clue. Mussolini promptly fathered the assassination on the Greek Government and served the people at Athens with an ultimatum styled on the pattern which had been first tried, very successfully, by the Italian liberals and pacifists of 1911 when they wanted war with Turkey, to be later perfected, although less luckily in the long run, by the Austrian monarchy of 1914 when it used the assassination of the crown prince as the welcome opportunity for a final showdown with Serbia. As the people at Athens answered the document with appalled cries and protestations of innocence, Mussolini's navy, heeding at length the well-known suggestion of d'Annunzio's *Ship*, sailed for the world. The first port of call was near at hand, Corfu, a Greek island in the Ionian sea.

It was an island too; but unlike any Adriatic island which Mussolini might have coveted before, it did not belong to Yugoslavia and therefore was not, presumably, under the direct or indirect protection of France. It was, moreover, far better than any Yugoslav island: a spot of beauty in this world. An unfortunate Empress of Austria had crowded her palace there with regrettable statues, and a half-connoisseur of archæology and art who happened to be the last Emperor of Germany had besmeared those walls with murals disfiguring Homeric heroes and ancient glory.

But the island was large enough, with plenty of olive groves and azure billows, to forget about this and about all other ugliness of anticlassic and neo-classic times.

A neo-classic lust for glory drove Mussolini's battleships to that shore. The island had, among the many features that made it desirable, a strategic position commanding the entrance to the "bitter" Adriatic sea; but far more than by foresight of any positive result Mussolini's mind was driven by a reminiscence that Corfu had belonged to the Roman and later to the Venetian Empire, that its very stones spoke, and that the Venetian dialect had not yet gone altogether fossil in several strata of the population. To seize Corfu was to "redeem" her: a word first used by the Italy of the Risorgimento when speaking of Trento and Trieste and such other Italian cities as still lay under foreign domination, but now duly being extended to any territory within the Roman boundaries of fifteen centuries before, and eventually beyond; until in 1936 it seemed fit to enlist Ethiopia in the roll of countries calling for "redemption."

The ships anchored; and after a hurried command to surrender, some gunshots were fired. There was no declaration of war: a formality which this time was omitted, with a considerable progress at least in frankness over the procedure that had been adopted by Giolitti against Turkey or by Austria against Serbia. There had been, however, an ultimatum and a half-juridical breathing spell before the shelling. Twelve and thirteen years later, in a further stage of progress, these last remnants of obsolete formalities were also forgone; no ultimatum or notice was served on Ethiopia or Spain. The danger was thus forestalled that the designated victim might perchance submit to any condition whatsoever, laming the flight of glory; and the self-appointed heirs to Rome and Roman law achieved an integral return to the law of the jungle.

To the formalities of September 1923 the garrison of Corfu opposed a refusal to surrender and a resistance which was only formal. But the wounds and deaths of a few injudicious civilians

were quite real. They had failed to realize that neo-classic glory may fly with modern, highly explosive wings. The conquering flag was hoisted on the old Venetian castle. The idea was to show to Fascists and Antifascists in Italy that Fascism, namely Mussolini, was able to do in one year what liberalism had not dreamed in half a century, and to celebrate the first anniversary of the March on Rome with a march abroad.

But France and England awoke to the fracas, the latter lion showing its teeth while withholding its roar. The Conference of the Ambassadors was hastily convoked in Paris. It was a party, or Sanhedrin, of well-dressed gentlemen, wielding occasionally what was left of supreme power over what was left of Europe.

The representative of Italy was Baron Romano Avezana, the new ambassador in Paris after the resignation of Sforza. Albeit with a rather weary and detached soul, he belonged to the reasonable group of the Consulta; and his monocle would grow dim not seldom at the perusal of the instructions and utterances flowing from dynamic Rome. He too, however, appreciated Mussolini's domestic and economic policy; nor could he help caring for the commodious palace of his embassy in Paris. Thus he carried on, faithfully patching up whatever the man at the other end of the wire tried to tear apart; until one day, not long after the Corfu affair, he dared to speak his mind face to face to the master. "Your prestige in the world is immense," said he, smuggling the reproof under the flattery, "you would be the greatest man of our age if you took the lead in a world policy for real collaboration and peace among the nations." Soon after this outburst of vaticination, unusual for his soft voice, he retired with a young wife somewhere in the Campanian countryside, there to vanish.

The task which confronted him at the Conference of the Ambassadors on the affair of Corfu was all but gratifying. It was up to him, inescapably, to push the bitter pill of renunciation and withdrawal into the fierce jaw of Mussolini. He did it well. He coated the pill with gold: which, inescapably also, had to be poor

Greece's gold. The representatives of France and England helped him, with skilled zeal, to round the compromise.

There, at the Conference of the Ambassadors in Paris, was given the informal premiere in contemporary history of a diplomatic play which was immediately taken into the repertoire, to be subsequently improved and repeated often in enlarged settings and with growing success. The main feature of the play consisted of Justice, International Justice, sitting between blatant right and flagrant wrong and impartially administering material ruin to the victim and moral blame to the offender. A perfected version of this pantomime was to be staged, several years later, in the case of China versus Japan about Manchukuo; until it climaxed in the League of Nations at the time of Ethiopia's doom, and in the committee on so-called non-intervention in the so-called civil war in Spain.

The performance at Paris in September 1923 was a dress rehearsal or a sketchy scenario rather than a real premiere, if compared to the achievements which the future held in store. Not yet did right and wrong counterweigh each other so accurately level on the scales of Justice, and the minds of the judges were heavily inclined toward Greece, whose case was upheld by the patency of her injuries as well as by the alarmed interests of France and England in the Mediterranean. But while appeasing the bleating lamb with a familiar gesture of her left hand, Justice, International Justice, puckered the opposite eye toward the wolf, pledging a way out.

No evidence, either direct or circumstantial, pointed to the lamb's having troubled the waters, to Greece's guilt in the murder of the Italian general. Greece was, however, subdued into apologizing and paying a fine for the crime she had not committed. This was the way out for Mussolini. For England and France only one thing mattered: that it was a way out of Corfu.

He did not celebrate a triumph with the Greek coins as the Roman Emperor Caligula had done with the pebbles and sea-shells gathered in his expedition against Britain. A part of the



sum was spent for purposes of beneficence, atoning for the bloodshed. But neither what was left nor the total amount of fifty million lire could have nearly covered the expenses of the expedition. The diplomatic disguise elaborated by Romano Avezana and his colleagues fooled the fools, in Italy and in the Balkans. All sensible people knew. The outcome of the first imperial war had been humiliation.

Now was the time for Contarini to return from his vacation. He muttered something unintelligible, and set again to work.

Three months after Corfu, by January 1924, all or almost all remaining differences between Italy and Yugoslavia were squared. The artificial city-state of Fiume, which in the mind of Sforza or of his advisers had been a temporary device suggested by temporary difficulties, was put to painless death. A portion of the territory went to Yugoslavia; the city, overwhelmingly Italian, to Italy. A treaty of friendship, almost an alliance, in the framework of the League of Nations, was signed between the two nations that had been so often on the verge of war.

It was the triumph of Contarini, although his name was unknown to most. It was, or seemed to be, Mussolini's road to Damascus.

All the Mazzinian-Wilsonians of Italy had withheld any expression of criticism during and after the conquest of Corfu. Fear of bludgeon and castor oil had not been the only motive behind the cautiousness of their behaviour. They had been inspired also by that sort of feeling that stops the breath of the onlooker while watching a sleepwalker. Several of them had gone so far as to support Mussolini, ostensibly, although with carefully graduated words. They had not wanted him to contend that national defeat was, this time as always, the wages of democratic discord. They had secretly anticipated that the inescapable failure, softened by the Ambassadors, would hurt the nation but slightly while teaching the man a lesson for ever.

This had happened, or thus they thought. Wherefore they, the mute or dissembling opponents, felicitated themselves on their

well-meant shrewdness, and rejoiced in the hope, which now seemed quite sensible, that the Fascist foam might early subside within the dikes of history and reason.

A motto, chiefly used by moderate Socialists, had been popular during the first years after the World War: "Either Wilson or Lenin," meaning that the only choice of mankind was between world-conciliation and world-revolution. Now, in 1924, Wilson and Lenin, almost simultaneously, died. Was it a sign that the task of showing the way to Western civilization came anew to Italy after the decline and fall of Wilson's Americanism? that Italy, after the short delirium of d'Annunzianism and Fascism, was called to meet her chance again, the chance of being herself and of fulfilling her mission as prescribed to her in the imperishable part of Dante's and Mazzini's prophecy? Overenthusiastic interpreters saw in the Italo-Yugoslav handshake not so much the epilogue of a miserable past as the prologue of a bright future; while more sober minds visioned the death of both the American and the Russian hero, and the concomitant events, as clear omens that all ideal issues were now void and that the way lay open to mediocrity and compromise.

But the failure, which seemed a final one, of Mussolini's march abroad, had unforeseen reflections on the inner situation of Italy. The steam of emotion and passion that had been rumbling in the political cauldron, deprived of its natural outlet toward foreign adventure, now gurgled back, increasing pressure and turmoil inside the country.

The general elections of April 1924 gave a huge majority to the Government; but, in spite of threat and violence, of supervision and manipulation, the oppositions polled a conspicuous vote in some key cities and provinces, especially in Lombardy.

The morning after the elections Mussolini, momentarily in Milan, wanted to see this writer again. The latter, who had ceased writing on politics immediately after the Italo-Yugoslav agreement, went reluctantly to the interview.

Mussolini looked gloomy and worried.

"What do you think," he asked abruptly, "of the electoral returns in Lombardy?"

"I think," said the other, "that they are a warning. What happens in Lombardy is usually a presage of what will happen in the nation. The electoral returns mean, obviously, a growing discontent."

"What would you do in my place?"

"I would try," the writer ventured, "to put into effect the plan you outlined in a Parliamentary speech not long ago. You said that the three large popular parties, Fascists, Socialists, and Catholics, should work together for the good of the nation. You said that the faction must die if this is the price at which the nation may live. You can do it."

"Too late."

These were the last words the writer heard from him.

Two months later the Matteotti tragedy broke out. Eight months later tyranny gripped Italy.

## January 3

WHETHER or not Mussolini must be held directly responsible, as the knowing mandator, in the kidnapping and murder of the young Socialist deputy Matteotti whose vehement indictments had so deeply perturbed him, is a moral problem the historical implications of which are comparatively not very relevant.

In spite of all accumulated evidence, a thoughtful soul which does not like to heap on any fellow-man more guilt than strict

certitude commands may still suppose that Mussolini's henchmen grossly misinterpreted his words, and that while he expressed anger and menace in the ruthless way of any drunkard in Romagna, they took his wild but general words as a warrant of death.

The same thoughtful soul may even think that perhaps the henchmen themselves did not have murder in their minds at the start of the affair. Perhaps—as the official version put it later, and as the obedient judges decided—they planned only to teach Matteotti the usual lesson. Then the circumstances of an unexpected struggle in the motor-car carried them beyond the plan.

But not only our deeds, our thoughts and passions also follow us. The forces of evil and the lust for violence which we have unchained in our imagination work alone, regardless of our positive intentions in the single moments; and the arrows of our desire hit targets which our conscious will had not contemplated.

In the course of his last interview with the writer Mussolini had opened a short parenthesis and said:

"My opponents do not take into account the fact that a revolutionary movement like this drags with it a wake of criminality. Instead of making my life-work difficult, they should help me master these forces of darkness."

He was eloquent and earnest. He seemed sincere.

The evening of the same day he left Milan. Shortly after his departure, houses flamed in the suburbs, moans of stabbed or clubbed opponents vanished in the night. Many whispered that the Premier himself, before quitting the Gubernatorial Palace, had whispered the orders.

No evidence was at hand. But the criminals went, as always, unpunished, and it is quite likely that Mussolini may have been sincere both while objurgating the forces of darkness and when enlightening them with the torches of arson.

Some time before, a leader of the opposition had been taught the usual lesson: of the consequences of which he was to die, after protracted agony. When the news of the blows reached Musso-

lini's desk, he went into a frenzy of anger and, shaking the telephone receiver, showered a storm of insults and threats against the police and whosoever had instigated or tolerated the doers. Such was the statement of an official, closest to him.

But another person, equally close, presumed to know that Mussolini had rubbed his hands and said: "This morning I am going to lunch with better appetite."

It is admissible that both statements were true. The criminals, however, were not tried.

He spoke to the Chamber of Deputies after the disappearance, unexplained as yet, of Matteotti. He expressed his horror at the mere thought that the disappearance might be final; his worst foe alone, he averred, could have committed such a crime. But he disbelieved the heartbreaking hypothesis, and his voice fell and rose, to depths of prayer, to heights of mystic faith, as he uttered the hope, nay, the confidence, that Matteotti should suddenly reappear among his colleagues in the Parliament.

If ever a man was genuine, this man was Mussolini at that moment. Had he possessed the power of resurrecting the dead, he would not have hesitated an eyewink to resurrect Matteotti. But while voicing in adequately tragic style his pity and terror, his hope and dismay, he knew quite well that the man had been killed and his body dumped somewhere in a remote wasteland of the Roman Campagna.

The murder as such was no novelty. It is correct that of all great revolutions Fascism had been the least bloody, with a death toll much inferior to that of the French Terror or Russian Communism; although the explanation of this relative moderation (in quantity if not in quality) lies plainly in the fact that Fascism had been no revolution, great or small, but only a coup d'état under the direct supervision of army and dynasty and virtually with the connivance of the Church. Whatever assassinations and minor violences might seem profitable and pleasant had been, however, perpetrated with impunity for five full years; and Fascism had already conquered Rome and the legal responsibility of power

when red or reddish workers were loaded on awful trucks to be shot ere daybreak in the suburbs of Turin, as later on it had already won undisputed dictatorial control when opponents of higher standing, among them occasionally a former friend of Mussolini, were awakened at night, in Florence or elsewhere, and slaughtered under the eyes of their wives and children.

Far more than in objective circumstances, the novelty about the present case lay in the state of mind of the oppositions. Incensed by the crime and by the evidence of how slight were the chances that Fascism might change its nature, but stimulated also by the loss of prestige which Mussolini had already incurred because of his failure in foreign policy and of the electoral warnings from several constituencies, they conceived the plan of bidding a final halt and of overthrowing the regime.

Looking backward, it seems incredible that this did not happen. But here again is an example of how decisively and unpredictably the choice of individual free will determines mass events.

It was not the vigour of Fascism and Mussolini that wrecked the plan. They seemed helpless. Often Mussolini, weak and sick, had fits of tears; sometimes at night, while he was restlessly seeking sleep in his private lodging, the candelabra were burning in his official salon overlooking Piazza Colonna, that the passersby might suppose him calmly working at his desk. It took him a month ere he could gather his forces and write for his daily an article under the bold heading: "Now begins another month"; it took over five months more before he dared to translate the menace into action.

The plan was wrecked because it was a plan. The flaw in the technique of the oppositions was that it was a technique.

The Roman and Italian people, of which it has been fittingly said that it is neither better nor worse than any other people, was quite good and responsive on that occasion. Workers' wives, piously indignant, strewed daily with flowers the spot where Matteotti had been kidnapped; fierce eyes read the white and yellow papers naming openly the accomplices of and the accomplices

in the deed, and hinting no less openly at the higher power that allegedly had set them to work; unprosecuted hands painted the walls with curses and threats. They would have done more, if more had been asked of them.

But the leaders of the opposition, or at least those among them who took the upper hand, had their plan. It was a wise one. They purposed to sap, little by little, the foundations of the regime and to see it crumble at a prearranged moment, after all precautions had been taken in order that the ruin should not damage too much either the ground of national life or themselves. They, meanwhile, would be able to watch the final collapse from a safe place. This proves that their indignation about the murder—the effects of which they were able to manage so scientifically—was not sufficiently strong, and that their moral height was not adequate to the mission of destroying a perversion which they feebly hated.

On a lower and merely political level it might have been a quite sensible plan to use Mussolini's fear as the snare in which to catch him and to bribe him, with a promise of impunity, into the restoration of the constitution and freedom and into collaboration with other parties and men. Such a plan, even at a moral and religious level, might have been justified with the desire of "breaking the chain of evil" or of "forgiving always, all," as a Tolstoi or Manzoni would have worded it.

But that way was not tried, save in scattered individual attempts lacking authority and power.

The deputies of the opposition walked out of the Parliament, withdrawing to a metaphorical Aventine. A story from the early Roman republic told of the plebs seceding to the hill of that name. But the plebeians were workmen and soldiers, necessary to the commonwealth, whereas the presence of his enemies and accusers in the Chamber was not indispensable to Mussolini. From now on they gathered, often fighting among themselves, in secret conventicles.

They called on the king, trying to unload on his meagre shoul-

ders the burden of initiative. He quickly shifted the topic of the conversation, and confided to the visitors that one of the princesses his daughters had shot a couple of quails that very morning in the Roman sky. His subconscious mind probably meant that God would take care of Matteotti, the God who takes care of the shot quail and of the fallen sparrow.

It did not seem, however, this time as if all the criminals could go unpunished. Under the pressure of popular clamour the direct doers were arrested and some of the accomplices, high officials who stood near Mussolini, were publicly dismissed or secretly shelved.

But not all of them liked it. Several of the self-styled scapegoats, or more often their volunteering spokesmen, began a whispering campaign, pointing to the Duce and leader as the one who had led. The whispers were composed into memorandums, which in their turn were mimeographed and widely circulated all over the country.

The plan of the opposition chiefs was to close more and more on Mussolini in a kind of third-degree procedure, finally to drive him insane into surrender and self-destruction.

On the other hand it was evident that the judicial inquiry, however slowed by the comprehensible prudence of the magistrates, at last was to lead, if watched by public opinion, to the leader himself. The acme of the technique was reached by December. Then the reversal came.

When Mussolini's fear became despair, his despair became courage. Deputations of Fascists from the provinces were flocking to him, complaining about their sorry plight and claiming support. The secretary of the party would strike his master's desk with an insolent fist. Caught between two fires, the man realized that no postponement was permissible now in the choice between ignominious jail, perhaps death, and the final crime of tyranny. Even a better man would have taken the latter chance. But tyranny was no crime to his mind; nay, crime itself was a word devoid of meaning for him.



The conspirators who had mistaken him for Dostoievsky's Raskolnikov had simply overlooked the fact that, although Mussolini was an intellectual anarchist of the Raskolnikov family, there was no Dostoievsky behind the scenes to pull the strings and to prompt words of Christian penitence and piety during the struggle of Will and Fear in his creature's soul.

The technique which he now chose in his turn was speedier than that of the opposition. It was the same which he had adopted, very successfully, for the conquest of Rome, and very unsuccessfully for the conquest of Corfu. It had its hazards.

He ordered the prison wardens to prepare as many beds as possible, and dispensed them from making a secret of this chore.

Then he appeared before the Chamber of Deputies. He said that if Fascism was an association of criminals, he took over himself the responsibility for all crimes. He challenged the opposition to bring public charges against him. In twenty-four hours, he promised, the issue would be clear.

The opposition was absent. The challenge was left unanswered.

In a sombrest moment during the foregoing months he had said to a woman friend, who later published the talk: "They do not know that I am a wild boar. I shall not die before driving my teeth into hounds and huntsmen."

But on the conclusive day he did not need to act as a boar. All the performance, rather, looked like the barking of a dog, perhaps a sick one, behind a rail.

The crowds disbanded. Dusk fell on the cities.

This happened in the afternoon of January 3, 1925. A page had been turned in the history of Italy and of the world.

# The Faces of Tyranny



## *High Tide*

NOW the law, or lawlessness, of tyranny was established at a breath-taking tempo. It took less than two years to erase from Italy all vestiges of what had been called modern or Western civilization, in the building of which Italy herself had had so large a part. By the end of 1926 the work—or wreckage—was complete: perhaps the smallest of revolutions, but certainly the greatest of involutions.

All rights, and therefore all duties, of free thought and action were trodden down. The deputies of the opposition, deprived of their mandates and immunities, and subjected to the pressure of threat or actual violence, were scared into concealment or apostasy or flight. The Matteotti murder trial was expedited in the penumbra of a provincial townlet, with no word allowed to defendants or judges or counsel that had not been previously spelt in Rome. The actual doers were served with mild sentences, proportionate to their sensible behaviour in court; the rest was silence. Dumini, the chief killer, an American-born gangster of Italian blood, was like the others given a short prison term; after which, however, he was taken to a remote confinement in dark Africa and later to an islet far off the Adriatic coast, where no eavesdropping had to be apprehended if he ever wanted to tell the story between sky and sea.

The press was captured wholesale and subjected to the task of multiplying to national unanimity the word of the One in Rome. No preventive censorship was enacted. It would have been an error. Censorship, however strict, is a limitation, not an abolition,

of the freedom of the press. Within the boundaries, however narrow, of what the executive has not prohibited, the writer or editor may feel safe to say what he thinks and knows, and to withhold in silence what he does not deem good or true. Even the blank spaces, where the censor's scissors have pierced at the eleventh hour, are expressions and protests.

The system now devised in Italy was far more efficient. The writer or editor was left free to write and print what he pleased; yet this freedom subsisted under the Damoclean sword not only of confiscation of the issue, not only of whatever consequences might emerge from the tyrant's penal and civil laws and from the unpredictable arbitrament of the tyrant's henchmen and squadrists, but also of three successive "admonitions," meant to sound like death knells, the last of which would be tantamount to final suppression of the paper.

The result of the invention was surprising. Every day the managers and owners of each daily, together with their staff of correspondents and editorial writers, deposited an increasingly conspicuous offering of flatteries and lies before the invisible throne of the lord: a sacrificial hara-kiri of their souls by which they endeavoured to avoid the material hardships that might descend on them from his dissatisfied mood. What they "freely" gave could never have been extorted by means of a compulsion from on high, and the working of fear proved far more productive than obedience to a command. The indefinite opportunities left open to their spontaneous ingenuity fostered their zeal, which they whipped into an idolatrous foam, each one of them striving indefatigably to outdo himself; until they all were a fraternity of howling dervishes and the dailies and weeklies looked like shrines competing in the worship of the One. Soon it became possible for the press office of the Leader to dictate to all the periodicals all over the country—either by talk over the telephone or by circular notes styled in a snappish military prose—the headlines, the size of the comments, even the types to be chosen for the news that was fit to print. Mussolini himself, not a humorist by trade,

was credited in popular opinion with the witticism that now all the political press could very well be abolished, leaving to the Italian people just one paper with the gramphonic title, *His Master's Voice*.

Authors and publishers of books and learned periodicals were spared the ruling for some time. Negative but life-saving precaution was deemed satisfactory in that field, without any requirement of creative enthusiasm. Croce's books, among others, were printed and circulated—provided that they did not contain a single explicit word about Fascism—although their texture was somehow watermarked with Antifascism, fairly visible against the light. Only defeatist books defiling the beauty of war were sternly advised to keep off; but a salutary fear in publishers and authors, and in translators as well, was in this field censorship enough.

The delay in the application of the policy to books has several explanations. For one thing, Blackshirts were not, nor have they yet become, bookworms; and the intellectual bread of Mussolini himself is made, usually, of clippings. They did not care too much about things which they could not hate since they usually did not know them; and the lengthy products of rather unintelligible wits, wandering in a few hundred copies, or little more, from ladies' afternoons to gentlemen's week-ends, left the Blackshirts unaffected, unless the author and the publisher had dared a brutally clear indictment of Fascism and its chief: in which unlikely event other means than gubernatorial admonition were at hand. To this may be added the consideration that tyranny, however fast, advances with the pace of a tightening screw rather than with the dash of the executioner's blade. A certain time was needed, even in the Italy of those years, ere the screw could be turned to the bitter end.

But another reason lies in the fact, which must be credited to Mussolini, that for a long time he was unable to overcome a shyness, or painfully dissimulated awe, before culture and poetry. What a newspaperman usually was, he thought he knew from the experience of himself and others; it was easy for him to be ruth-

less against his peers. But not all remembrance had vanished of those moments in his adolescence when philosophies and poems had loomed above his confused ambitions with the glow, however remote, of celestial luminaries. He stopped awhile, perplexed, before riding on horseback into the Haghia Sophia of knowledge and beauty.

He was, however, unduly impressed by the sanctity of the temple, or at least of its hierophants. Knowledge and beauty are not the signal features of the contemporary world. Had there been such things, no such thing as Fascism would have been born.

Strangely enough, it was a foreign liberal author who first gave to Mussolini a hint about the possibility of carrying his press policy into the world of books. Despite the self-evident superfluity of his act and the beseechings of the alarmed publisher, he applied to Mussolini personally, asking from him permission to publish in Italian translation a book of his, the title of which was *July '14*. His only motive was the desire of enhancing a gratifying familiarity with so great a man; nor was his conscience fully aware of the vicious precedent he was setting. Another extenuating circumstance may lie in the assumption that even without this author's meddling in so delicate an affair the march of events would have been the same; because the logic of his deeds follows the doer, and evil feeds on evil.

On the whole, the snare devised for publishers and authors was a replica of the one in which the daily press had surrendered not only its freedom but also whatever decency can be preserved in servitude. Authors and publishers were free to write and print what they pleased, but under all the menaces kept in store by law and lawlessness as well, and with the additional risk for the publisher of seeing the edition confiscated and the expenditure forfeited. Time and again this torment, the efficiency of which lay in the dizzying vagueness of the danger involved, was experimented with also on the stage. The Duce himself, with a retinue of high-capped officials, deigned to attend the Italian premiere of an opera which had already been performed in Germany. Libret-

tist and composer, Pirandello and Malipiero, were both zealots of Fascism; and preventive censorship, which even in the liberal era in Italy as elsewhere had always held control of public spectacles, had certainly not been denied this time the opportunity of testing the text. But the dramatist, rather distraughtly, had bumped against the sanctity of the family, a pillar of the regime; and the musician had added the charm of his sophisticated counterpoint to the chat and song of prostitutes: a trade which, although not snubbed by State and Church, seemed by all means more appropriate for the shadow of the sidewalks than for the glare of the limelight. The Duce increased with an unexpected feature the attractions of the soiree, airing in unmistakable ways his disapproval and disgust; and the performances were stopped the day after, regardless of the cost. A letter from Pirandello was not acknowledged by the high recipient.

In literature and the fine arts the results of the method were no less satisfactory than in the daily press. Soon the exhibitions teemed with portraits and statues of Fascist heroes, naked or accoutred, and with spacious paintings in which Mussolini and his fellow-*Quadrumvirs* were shown briskly marching on the road to Rome, without any assistance of sleeping cars. Even the most candid and humble of provincial authors sat quivering at his desk, mindful not to forget that his protagonist had carried a black shirt in his valise, that the wine grown in the vineyards near the native town of the Duce was good indeed, and that the poor widow, whenever her heart ached, found plenty of relief if her eyes happened to turn to the picture of the Duce on horseback.

What was done to press and book, to thought and imagination, was impartially done to each and every function and body of citizenship and state. Chamber, Senate, Monarchy, Supreme Courts, were made rubber stamps. Each institution was stricken first in its nerve centres and devitalized, with the purpose of burying it quietly when sufficient time had elapsed to convince the people that the institution, giving no sign of life, was now only an encumbrance. The Chamber of Deputies was the most hated and



dreaded of all institutions, owing not only to the memory of its past power but also to the fear lest even in an assembly of four hundred lackeys a hero or maniac might start up at any time from an unwatched bench. Therefore the Chamber was singled out to be buried first. In 1934 the citizens, united in one national constituency, or, as it were, in one herd under one shepherd, were called again to the polls, for the third time in the Fascist era, and provided with transparent envelopes in which to seal but not to conceal their votes: with the understood agreement that they consented to vote the Fascist ticket unanimously, and under plain notice that this third ballot or paper game (*ludo cartaceo*, as Mussolini dubbed it) was to be the last. A corporate assembly was scheduled to take the place of the deceased Chamber. The surrogate was to be smaller in size, and bereft of the prestige, even if only external, that had accrued to Parliaments in a tradition of centuries. It was to be or not to be convoked according to the unfathomable choice of the despot, and recruited entirely among employees munching their fodder at the manger of the state.

The Senate was and is hardly worth mentioning. It was and is a clubhouse with commodious armchairs and a fine library. Unanimity had always hovered on those gatherings of temperate gentlemen and slumbering emeriti; and no effort was required to perfect into a flawless conformism an inclination that was inborn in their society. Municipal and provincial elections were rashly done away with; the very name of mayor was stamped out, and all towns and cities were subjected to a Duce-appointed Podestà, surrounded, as were the governors of the provinces, by a picked circle of nodding councillors. The meaning of this legislation was heightened by a spicy jest, as Mussolini granted the right of vote in administrative elections to women, just on the eve of withdrawing it from males and females alike.

Monarchy had undergone the first stage of mummification, prior to burial, when the king accepted the menial job of signing Mussolini's decrees. Much later, after the Ethiopian conquest, he was dubbed Emperor, while Mussolini with another surprising

jocularity coined for himself the title of Founder of the Empire. But meanwhile the second stage of mummification had been achieved when the king's son was silently deprived of the title of crown prince and the Grand Council of Fascism, that is, Mussolini, was entrusted with the office of controlling the succession to the throne. This decree, like any other, was countersigned by the king. Finally, in 1936, Mussolini established a succession of his own, parallel or opposite to the prospective succession in the dynasty; and, while Prince Humbert and the other princes of the House of Savoy delayed in begetting male offspring, he, the new sovereign, free from the bondage of the Salic law, quite openly preferred his first-born girl to all his other children and appointed overtly as his political heir the young man whom he had married to his daughter Edda.

The right of association was nullified. The first target was Freemasonry: a clever choice, since this association, while dreaded by Fascism and hated by the Church, was disliked also by many liberals who not without reason objected to the secrecy and intrigues of its proceedings, and by such philosophers as Croce and his followers, who blamed it for the eighteenth-century ideologies which they ridiculed and which the Masonic lodges obdurately countenanced. After and together with the ruin of Freemasonry all political associations and parties, including the liberal, were smashed. An identical destiny befell all intellectual organizations, such as academies and other scholarly or artistic bodies, unless they spontaneously passed under the direct control of the almighty one. A national philosophical congress was called in Milan in the spring of 1926. It discussed in one of its meetings the educational policy of the Government, and did not prove unanimous in endorsing it. Next day the congressmen found the doors of the meeting hall locked and guarded by police. The chairman, Martinetti, professor of philosophy in the University of Milan, was advised to take a long leave of absence in the country, and only by a hair's breadth escaped, at least for the time, the punishment of dismissal. A few years later spontaneous

self-annihilation was decreed also to the harmless and rather funny provincial associations where bourgeois and bourgeoises assembled to listen to vernacular verse, rejoice in modest dance, and play cards or beano. The pretext brought forward to justify this measure was that the provincial and regional spirit does not foster national unity. The real reason was that, as it is true according to the Gospel that wherever two or three are gathered together Christ is in the midst of them, so is it true in the tyrant's imagination that, whenever three meet, the third is a Brutus.

All judicial guaranties were abrogated, and nothing was left that might even from afar resemble the habeas corpus or the inviolability of domicile. No Saint Paul could have fooled himself, under Fascist rule, into thinking that there was an appeal to the supreme justice of Nero against the unrighteousness of the single tribunal, since it was well known that any single tribunal strove only to enact in its prescribed limits the unrighteousness desired above. No miller of Sans-Souci could have defied the encroachment of despotism on his private right, stating that "there were judges in Berlin," according to the popular story about enlightened despotism in the eighteenth century; since there were no judges in Rome, but only scribes penning the imparted or guessed dictate of the dictator. Thus justice, like all the other functions of the body politic, was paralysed; until, in 1936, the first announcement of the impending burial came out. It was announced that Mussolini planned to suppress all courts, replacing them by governmental committees and enrolling all judges and lawyers as salaried officials of the state. True, the news was immediately denied; but people shook their heads, remembering how often Fascism had advertised a plan, apparently incredible, then had withdrawn it, in the expectation that the national soul after a period of incubation would prove ready to accept an offence which at first would have seemed unbearable.

A man of grim looks, the nationalist Rocco, was the jurist who prepared the legal framework for this wholesale enslavement of

a nation. He was a Southern professor of law, teaching in the traditionalist University of Padua, the offspring of a Neapolitan family, unbendingly legitimist and clerical. Nothing in his mental or sentimental background prevented him from thinking and feeling—if feeling is the word for it—in the ways of the Spanish Inquisition. The logical subtlety of his mind enlivened with a cold glow the cruelty of his purpose. All Western civilization had respected, and even admired, political criminals, whose deeds were by no means considered as belonging to the same category as those of burglars and thieves. Whenever the state struck at them it was necessity and not moral conviction that armed its hand; and while conspirators or even terrorists were locked up or shot down, Justice herself seemed to veil her face, mindful that a coming generation might perhaps adorn with palms of martyrdom the cells or graves of erstwhile offenders. Rocco turned upside down this conventional attitude. "If the common criminal," said he, "hurts the individual, the political criminal hurts the community; right it is, therefore, that the hand of Justice be heavier on the latter." The principle was embodied in articles of law, and scrupulously applied by prison wardens. The alimentary diet of conspirators and dissenters, the rules preventing them from writing except once a week to members of their families and from reading anything that was not supplied by the prison library, even the time assigned for their physical exercise, shorter than that for common offenders—everything, in a word, was ordained so as to make life for them more difficult than for burglars and thieves and to train them as fast as possible in the political cell for final destination in the asylum or cemetery, or for final disgrace in recantation. This latter and somehow blander course was often preferred by Mussolini, as far as he was concerned. Inspired by the desire of proving the Machiavellian dogma that all men are despicable, he cared more for dead souls than for dead bodies. Accordingly, he might wish rather the perversion of the sinner than his death.

Death, however, had its due. The Italy of the Risorgimento

had been proud of one of her forefathers in eighteenth-century philosophy: Cesare Beccaria, author of a classic against capital punishment. The school of criminology that flourished in Italy at the close of the nineteenth century had stressed both the idiocy and the horror of this so-called weapon of social defence. The death penalty in Italy—except by courts martial in wartime—had fallen into desuetude, until it was formally erased from the written law. Now Fascism gloried in reinstating it. "If it is right," said Rocco, "that the best of citizens, the soldier, offer his life for the welfare of the community, much more is it right that the worst of citizens, the criminal, offer his life for the same purpose." Approximately at the same time, and under the same inspiration, the nationalist daily was trying hard to discipline philosophically such philosophers as opposed the Fascist state. "Since Croce is a philosopher," the editor contended, "he should be reminded of the greatest of all philosophical examples: Socrates, who submitted to the laws of his state and drank dutifully his hemlock."

In the following years an execution, not necessarily of political offenders, was staged almost regularly on one of the days preceding the twenty-eighth of October, as an understood item in the schedule of exercises celebrating the anniversary of the March on Rome. No executioner was appointed by the state. Militiamen, in firing squads, did the thing, each one of them having been previously informed that the act entrusted to him was a privilege and honour. They insulted the victim loudly; then, having fired their rifles, they shouted: *Alalà!* All care was taken to impress the nation, of which the ruler wanted to make a nation of killers, with the belief that shedding, coldly and safely, the blood of fellow-men was a military, nay, an heroic deed, to be dissociated from such implications of guilt or dire necessity as hovered on analogous performances when the performer was a despicable or unhappy hangman in a liberalistic country.

The Italy of the *Risorgimento* had worshipped a young hero from Trieste, Guglielmo Oberdan, who, after having spent some time in Italy, crossed the Austrian border and surrendered to the

police, confessing the purpose of assassinating the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef and exhibiting the means thereto. His real purpose was to die, as he did, leaving "a warning to tyrants outside and to cowards inside" and spending his sacrificial youth for the future redemption of his native Italian city, writhing under the foreign heel. Now Fascism drafted several Oberdans, conspirators desirous to shed not so much the tyrant's blood as their own, and Italy, the apostate of the Risorgimento, took upon herself the loathed heritage of Austria. The secret police favoured in the shadow such plots on Mussolini's life as they could trace to their origin, providing the plotters with the conditions aptest to foster their plans, until, all accomplices having been netted and flagrant evidence supplied, the moment came for police and Government to lift the curtain and to stage a mystery story with an awe-inspiring trial. Rumour had it that one of these attempts was entirely a sham of the police, instructed or self-instructed to arrange the spectacular setting which their chief needed for another onrush of despotic laws; and no enlightenment came to public opinion from the mob- or police-lynching of an unknown boy who allegedly had aimed at and missed Mussolini. Some time later, a man named Schirru—quite a new Oberdan, whom only religious consciences inflexibly deprecating violence could have condemned—was arrested and charged with having thought of killing Mussolini. On avowal of the thought, he was shot by a firing squad. A heresy equalizing imagination and action, intention and deed, and disrupting in human hearts the time-honoured notion that "nothing is in the world that is not in the fact," became a doctrine of the Fascist state, under the tolerant eye of the Roman Church. The contagion was to spread beyond the boundaries of the country which invented it. Hitler, the evangelizer and enlarger of Fascism, the Paul of the Antichrist, perfected this Fascist feature among others, and added retroactive laws scrapping any social contract between individual and state, and punishing with death thoughts or deeds which no law listed as capital offences at the time when they were committed. In the summer of 1936

and in the winter of 1937 Russia herself, the herald of brotherhood and peace, actually killed a number of people who had thought of killing Stalin and who, most humbly and abjectly, had repented the thought.

Thus the Italian nation slid into a servitude more severe than any recorded by ancient or modern history. Never before had despotism gripped so large a mass of men, impinging on so many molecular details of individual life. Never before had a doctrine of despotism abjured so thoroughly all the doctrine of white civilization, which had been substantially consistent from Homer to the Prophets, from Marcus Aurelius to Abraham Lincoln, from the Fathers of the Church to Spinoza or Kant.

The individual was moulded into a passive tool of the state, and totally stripped of any right or purpose that was his own. The adjective totalitarian and the noun totalitarianism were forged, later to assume world-wide significance through the intermediary of Nazi Germany. On the other hand, the state on behalf of which the citizen abdicated was the private estate of one single man; or, according to Stirner's anarchical slogan as Mussolini would have construed it, the despot and his state were *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, the One and his Property. The pretended totality of the nation-state was the autarchy of one personality, under whose all-devouring arbitrament the other forty millions were not only prevented from thinking and feeling like free individuals but also from thinking and feeling like members disciplined in the moral community of mankind. National discipline, a virtue in itself, severed from any connexion with human solidarity, was forced to serve the purpose of the undisciplinable one and eventually to shatter in anarchy the international law, that he might triumph in unshared freedom. The logic of self-defence during the Matteotti affair, together with the intellectual poisons which he had harboured long since in his unprotected mind, made Mussolini the disproportionate but effective fulfiller of all romantic frenzies, Byronic or Nietzschean. Elizabeth Foerster, the surviving sister of Nietzsche, hailed him the Disciple.

By the end of 1926 the new Italy was roofed: a penitentiary for compulsory labour and compulsory perversion. They called it a new civilization, the third civilization of Italy after Antiquity and Christianity, and the civilization of the twentieth century: to be later outstripped by Hitler, visioning the future of Nazism not in terms of centuries but of æons. The Italian Fascists introduced also a new calendar starting a new era with October 28, 1922, the date of the great involution; thereby aping the calendar (short-lived indeed) of the French revolution and throwing into the shadow the Christian numeration of the years, in the hope perhaps that some day the March on Rome might supersede altogether the birth of Christ.

The resistance of the Italian people against its fate was not so gallant as that of the Spanish people was to be in 1936. But neither was its submission so helplessly grovelling as that of the German people was to be in 1933, when Hitler rose. Moreover, the issues in Italy were for a long time not so clear as they were to be in Germany or Spain; and the significance of the events, wrapped in beguiling tricks and in deceitful hopes, did not become imperative until 1925 and 1926, when it was too late. In spite of such circumstances a few thousands crowned their lives with faithful death; their graves are scattered along a path of years running from the early street riots of 1919 to the legal assassinations after the establishment of tyranny. Many workmen and intellectuals battled their way to exile, not seldom to meet a tragic end in starvation and suicide, which they could easily have avoided through conformism, or even mere silence, at home. Lauro de Bosis, a poet, flew from France to Rome there to drop leaflets of idealistic propaganda, and never to be seen again. Carlo Rosselli, perhaps the most promising among the expatriates, a writer, a fighter, a leader, was assassinated together with his brother in France, on an anniversary of the Matteotti murder, June 10, 1937, by executioners obviously appointed to repeat with heightened skill the deed which had opened the way to tyranny. Meanwhile the prisons in Italy and the dreary islands were full to ca-



capacity; they are still not empty. A murmur of distress and contempt went on under the surface of forced consent; it has not subsided. Often the sparks of popular wit dotted the darkness, making it gloomier, as *ignes fatui* flicker on a cemetery.

## Socialism Disarms

**T**HAT the resistance was not stronger and ultimately victorious is explained by many reasons, several of which are clear in the preceding narrative.

No victorious resistance could be expected from the so-called proletariat, since no such thing exists as the resolute dualism of warring classes fancied in Marxian mythology: which was not the most meagre among the many sources of confusion and error that flooded European intelligence in the decline of the nineteenth century. Not yet has the proletariat as such acted as a conscious force in history; and no sooner has a leader levied that mass and set it marching behind him than he and the group around him cease to be proletarians, if they ever were, and change into executives and chieftains, belonging intellectually and socially to the class which they oppose. But in fact they seldom had been proletarians. And if the economic background of captains and hosts were decisive in the interpretation of history, then Fascism and Nazism would be entitled to claim, as they do, that they and not Socialism or Communism are fulfilling the ideal of the democratic and proletarian state. Not only are their totalitarian throngs and armies recruited, as they are in Russia, among peasants and workers, but the leaders themselves, Hitler and Mussolini, a house-

painter and a schoolmaster, can boast much closer connexions with the proletariat than most other leaders in the world of to-day, including the Bolsheviks.

The objectionable intercourse of Lassalle with Bismarck was not an isolated incident; and the collusion of Marxian socialism with the military and reactionary state lay in the nature of things. Nay, there had been a common source of Marx and Nietzsche or Stirner, of apocalyptic socialism and superhuman anarchism; which source had sprung from the common disintegration of European culture. Forebodings had been noticeable in doctrinaires of the French revolutionary and post-revolutionary time, from Saint-Just to Blanqui; but the phenomenon in its gigantic proportions materialized in Germany, where a comparatively backward society took up the Machiavellian theory of the Prince and the State, forging in Fichte's oratory the fetish of philosophical nationalism and nurturing in the ample folds of Hegel's dialectics the idolatry of Prussian bureaucracy and hierarchy which was to pave the way to Bismarck's doctrine. Marx and Nietzsche, stray pupils, had diverted those ideological waters into unexpected meanders; but by no means prevented them from flowing finally, as they had been predestined by their origin, into the dark pool of Fascism or Nazism: a perfected Prussian state with a word-catapulting demagogue in the place of the legitimate war-lord, or a Platonic Commonwealth or Common Misery with a beast-king instead of a philosopher-king.

To be sure, the ultimate goal of a classless and thoroughly human society remained unremoved at the horizon of Socialism. Having been born as the legitimate offspring of the eighteenth-century revolutions, in the spirit of a world-uniting appeal for mutual collaboration and love, Socialism could never forget altogether the nobility of its birth. But neither was it able to resist the suggestions that came from the German-Jewish tutors of its deformed adolescence and from intellectual drunkards or romantic cloud-gatherers like Georges Sorel. Inspired by Old Testament reminiscences, they endowed God—or History, as they called

Him—with their personal or group resentments and with their eagerness for cataclysms unparalleled. Inflamed by the grandeur of Napoleonic or Prussian militarism, they conceived class warfare as a new opportunity for the beauty of war, and the myth of the General Strike, the nation-wide immobilization of the workers, as another military display, more impressive than the general mobilization of the armies. Darwinism, as they understood it, added the authority of science to the stimuli of their desire, since in the struggle for life and in the survival of the fittest they did not see the fetters of nature, a bondage which human intelligence and love are called to redeem, but the very core of history, the substance of God.

This sweeping propaganda for a social apocalypse in fire and blood proved in the long run to be a boon for capitalism and the bourgeoisie, which theretofore had lacked any definite class consciousness, and now, spurred by Marxism, hurriedly donned an armour fit to match the challenge and turned from conservatism to aggression. If war must be, class war, why not fight? Why shrink in doomed, however comfortably furnished, hiding places? The implements of war, gold and steel, were after all in the hands of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. They could afford the risk. When Mussolini came up, a personality as mediocre in itself as it was stupendously significant in the symbolism of its career, he was, in this regard no less than in all others, a resultant rather than a force, a symptom rather than the disease. In the inner forum of his conscience his transit from Socialism to Nationalism, from proletariat to tyranny, may have been apostasy and treachery. But in the objective dialectics of fate he became ultra-black as a deducible consequence of his having been and being ultra-red.

The reasons why capitalism and the bourgeoisie, however hard pressed by a hungry autocracy, must take sides with it, seemed adequately clear. It was not equally clear why the proletariat should wage a fight to the finish. Socialism, in its blander form of a merely economic theory, had developed into a sort of Unchristian Science, holding that the physical body of society is ill and

that the recovery of the body will bring about the permanent welfare of the supposed soul as well. The first half of the proposition is obviously true. The second half is crudely wrong. While it must be stressed, against asceticism, that bodily health is necessary to individual and social happiness, no evidence, on the other hand, substantiates the claim that material prosperity in itself is sufficient for that goal; and there is some likelihood in the misgiving that injustice and sorrow still could be plentiful in a perfectly vitaminized and air-conditioned society. Truth still is where it stood with Plato or Mazzini, with Dante or Kant: in the conviction that perfection both in intelligence and action, in mind and heart, is the unchanging aim of changing society and that any political or economic scheme has its value in the measure in which it serves that all-ruling finality. Materialistic Socialism, as it had been imparted to the poor Italian masses, lacked this conviction, thereby lacking also that amount of energy which is usually called faith and which alone can move mountains and masses as well.

Indeed, if the stress of propaganda and conviction is laid on economic fairness and welfare as if they were ends in themselves rather than means to a purpose, what reason makes imperative the sacrifice of a battling generation to generations to come? Why should we, made fanatical by the vision of a prosperity that does not concern us, overlook the fat or thin cows waiting for us around our corner? The cynicism of the king who said: "After me the deluge," becomes a wise rejoinder to so unnatural a demand, and a candour of evangelical carelessness trusting that God will feed the birds and clothe the lilies of tomorrow, ennobles the insipid joke stating that we have no obligation toward posterity, since posterity did nothing for us.

Neither is any more compelling, in the framework of a rigorous materialism, the discrimination which holds class solidarity very good and any other kind of solidarity including the national very bad, class warfare or civil war excellent and any other kind of war abominable. The high-school teacher, Enrico Corradini, who at the dawn of this century founded Italian Nationalism, was

probably the first to defeat the Marxian purpose with Marxian terminology. He forged the slogan about Italy being altogether a proletarian nation, hence deducing that class struggle could have no other meaning for the Italian people than the suggestion of nationalistic warfare against the capitalistic and plutocratic nations. A few years later a sweet-voiced but rather weak-minded poet from Romagna, Giovanni Pascoli, who had been a sentimental Socialist in his youth and now was sentimentally drifting toward other shores, took up the nationalistic slogan and delivered a speech inciting the Italians to the conquest of Libya, which he entitled: "The Great Proletarian Sets Forth." He was the most popular of Italian poets after d'Annunzio, and the professorship which he held in the University of Bologna as the successor of the national poet Carducci gave a kind of official authority to his words. Additional suggestions in the same direction came with increasing insistence, in the years around the World War, from the black camp; and when Mussolini seized power the mental soil of Italy had been thoroughly tilled, and there was hardly a literate in the country who was not permeated with the notion that some sort of imperialism was the only sensible way of fulfilling the Marxian prophecy as far as the Italian masses were concerned. The example set by German Socialism, the first-born of Marxian churches, with its conformism to Prussian militarism at the start of the war, played into the hands of the Blacks, showing again that nation was the truth and class was the fiction.

These considerations account sufficiently not only for the lack of resistance of the Italian proletariat to Fascism but also for the failure, in so many other countries, of Socialism, numerically a giant and practically a cripple. Not even Russia is an exception; because Socialism there, as far as it really prevailed, was the result of the Bolsheviks' Marxism as much as it was of Tolstoi's and others' mysticism. The peasants and workers of Italy and of other countries where such backgrounds were not operative could not very well realize why the Communist famine in the Ukraine, with its millions of victims, should be held better than destitution

and crawling but not destructive misery in a capitalistic state, why martyrdom for the benefit of generations to come should be preferred to the daily bread and breath of compromise. There were slums in Naples, but in Leningrad and in London too; there was regimentation in Fascism as well as in Communism; exploitation and injustice seemed to be features indifferently present and equally ineradicable in democratic and in dictatorial governments. The promises of Fascism, for the rest, if economic materialism was the ultimate criterion, sounded no less worth listening to than those of any other demagoguery or tyranny; its cornucopia, stuffed with social insurances, Corporative State, reclamations of land, and acquisition of colonial empires, was a lure hardly less attractive than the Socialist one had been; and the proletariat, like Buridan's ass between the two bundles of hay, equidistant and equipoised, was deprived of both and of that freedom of choice which persists only in the freedom of faith.

As economic class warfare had not been the essential source of Fascism, so could not class insurrection be its final issue. The sin had been in the mind; and from the mind should have come redemption.

## *Ordeal of the Intelligentsia*

**B**UT the Italian mind, this saddest instance in a world-wide abdication of culture, had few if any reserves of force against the disease which itself had bred. D'Annunzio still was the most famed poet, although no longer writing and hardly read by the new generation. After the loss of his kingship

in Fiume he had retired to a villa on the lake of Garda, with which the Italian Government, not yet Fascist, presented him, wishing to have him quiet down in a lovely shelter. It had belonged to Germans, relatives of Richard Wagner, who hated to see it now annexed as a booty of war by the victor country and desecrated by the new occupant. They claimed it back with long yet vain outcry. The musical and heroic reminiscences of Liszt and Wagner that filled its rooms were mournful in the failure and in the creeping old age of him who had been denied the destiny of his beloved Siegfried. But he could bear them; and unwilling now to mix with the crowd as a commoner after an unforgettable dream of seigniorship, he made of the middle-sized cottage, which he enlarged to a mansion, a strange sort of Escorial or Vatican, where he imposed on himself voluntary imprisonment. The slopes and dales around the building, the rivulets and groves, were hallowed with the emblems of most surprising superstitions; a discarded battleship, another gift of liberal Italy to her ageing child, was lifted somehow to a hilltop, there to salute with the rotund voice of its real guns whatever dates of Fatherland- and Self-worship the poet might have inscribed in his crowded calendar. The house itself was ordinarily closed to the daylight, and only flowers of nacre and enamel breathed its stuffy air. Often he would seclude himself for several days and nights, invisible in his room, as if the prisoner had gone of his own will into a cell of solitary confinement, then suddenly would appear at dinner in his gala military wear, like Ibsen's Borkman in the formal clothes of his better days. Or in a lighter mood, he would sit in the gown of a Franciscan friar—English-tailored, to be sure, and silk-lined—while a servant maid, or as he dubbed her, "Clarissa," hiding her good-humoured laugh in the profundity of her bow, swung a burning thurible before the smile of that saint. Books of devotion, on tables and lecterns, did not shun the close vicinity of precious lewd prints; a Prisoner of Michelangelo, copied in marble, had his virile hips and thighs skirted in brocade; a bed as narrow as a coffin, in a conveniently outfitted room, awaited once a month the poet

that he might lie supine and be edified by the admonition of approaching death.

He did not particularly enjoy the March on Rome and the rise of Fascism, which from a literary point of view were sheer plagiarism. However, the successes of his ideas and plans, if not of his personality, were for the frustrated author royalties of a sort; and he could play for time, expecting, if nothing else, opportunities for new military and lyric feats when the new wars hatched by Fascism should break out. They did not, and when the Matteotti crisis broke out in their place, he squeezed open his long-compressed grudge at last, riposting, when asked what he thought of Fascism in its predicament: "It is a stinking ruin." It was not, as everybody was forced to know on January 3, 1925; but Mussolini did not mind that winged sentence, another "mutilated victory"; and from now on d'Annunzio was for him hardly more than a financial worry which he confronted as best he could with an Augustan benevolence rewarded at reasonable intervals with messages of love, of admiration, of incitement to conquest and glory, penned in the poet's ever-taller longhand, on paper as heavy as marble. Sometimes the newspapers were ordered to print these Psalms, even in photostatic facsimiles (although of course in reduced size); at other times they were curtly commanded to ignore them. There was no rule or purpose in such an alternation of favour and frown, but only the pleasure of high-handed caprice. Meanwhile the poet reached the seventy-year mark, and passed it; yet he never dismissed the dream of death in the fury and glamour of national war and world conflagration: a finale in beauty which he had missed in Fiume and which was wholly deserved by a lofty imagination and a powerful temper, however misguided by the incompetence of the mind and the insensitivity of the heart.

The minor authors, if they belonged to the set of the provincial or crepuscular poets and novelists, had only to keep on etching in lengthy paragraphs the gracefulness of their campaniles, nurturing the mother-complex, and praising the time-honoured vir-



tues of poverty and submission. Melancholy was still permissible; and not yet did the state take official offence if a poet still liked to sing in ebbing tones the tedium of a Sunday afternoon. All they had to do was to be careful not to trespass beyond the limits that were set to such feelings by Mussolini himself, vigilantly distrustful toward what he called mollusc-literature. Melancholy was not allowed to grow to protest and despair or to seek an outlet in suicide, which was strictly prohibited as a literary topic. Not only were publishers, managers of periodicals, and stage producers most persuasively warned against accepting stories or plays of self-destruction, but suicide was ousted from among the objective happenings of this world; so that when Ivar Krueger and George Eastman, in Europe and in America, almost simultaneously chose a voluntary end, the newspapers in Italy were instructed to print in the same issue that both these interesting personalities had succumbed to sudden death. It was one of the particular features of Fascism to draft all virtues to the compulsory service of evil. Optimism and courage were good as training for aggressive war; suicide was bad not because it infringes a universal moral law but because by asserting the self-determination of the individual it denies the individual's passive servitude to the One. In the same way motherhood, unrestrained by any kind of birth-control, was sanctified not because it is holy in itself but because the maternal womb is an irreplaceable factory for the output of warriors; and Catholic religion was strenuously protected not in so far as it perpetuates the word of Christ but in so far as it is imperial and Roman and supplies, with the promise of a Paradise in the shade of the swords, an anæsthetic for the falling soldier. Consequently anti-Catholic or antipopish witticism was proscribed with a rigorism unheard of in the former Papal States, where a satirist of sacrilegious tongue like the poet Belli had been benignantly let alone; and dead earnest was prescribed in all matters concerning, however triflingly, the parish and the home. Nothing was so alien to the Fascist mind as the genuine Christianity of Manzoni. Nevertheless, a popular novelist, Guido da Verona, who had

poked fun at piety and chastity as they are depicted and preached in Manzoni's *Betrothed*, had a quite narrow and not quite painless escape, although he was a good Fascist, and author among other best-sellers of an epistle eulogizing Mussolini as the Ideal Gentleman. Another author was properly scolded for having stated in a short story that "the unfortunate man had nine children," and a third one had trouble with the Government when he groomed anew some century-old facetiæ about mothers-in-law which his own mother-in-law had not minded. In the cadre of the virtues debauched by Fascism to serve its purpose, those pertaining to fireside and altar had a privileged rank; but the provincial and pastoral writers and poets had always toyed with chasubles and aprons; so they did not need to be much worried about the change. All that was required of them (beside tightening their belts) was to underscore from time to time the Fascist use of domestic virtue, and to tune up quite a bit the adagio of their pathetic mood. They did it and survived.

As for the other set of minor writers, they were mostly æsthetes and Vestal guardians of linguistic purism and of the unbending primacy of Italian tradition. To Fascist nationalism they felt necessarily sympathetic, and the extra dividends dripping from the boom in national conceit were royalties also for them. In a less metaphorical way they had, like many of their colleagues, constantly cherished the ideal of a Mæcenas state, utopian in a democracy. Now a new Augustan era, another Golden Age, was at hand. Crumbs fell from the rich man's table, and occasionally a purse. The new Academy, in an enchanting palace frescoed by Raphael, topped all attractions: an institution meant partly as a laurel-camouflaged ambush for carelessly perambulating intellectuals and artists who had a soul to lose and partly as a Valhalla where the braves who did not shirk the hara-kiri of their souls might be rewarded with a livery and a living.

Minor writers, in spite of their inflated reputation in the inflationary post-war years, were the playwrights who specialized in the tragic farce, a boredom in the long run, picturing the double

or multiple personality of man and rejoicing in the chaotic impulses that baffle human reason; or such intellectual tramps as in their nimble youth had registered overnight in many wayside inns of cheap revolutionary thought, later to seek permanent abode under the vaults of state and Church. They did not need to become Fascists, since they intrinsically were so. Where the mind is hollow, authoritarian superstition rushes in to fill the vacuum.

One at least, however, among the authors of the generation of Mussolini should have had a voice of his own. Among other things he had written, shortly before the triumph of Fascism, a novel in which an intellectual petty bourgeois, lacking any rational or economic security—and a deluded young veteran at that—torn between ambivalent ambitions and selfish desires, plods his desperate way through the mud and smoke of post-war confusion until a cavalry charge during a riot in Bologna tramples him, a vagabond onlooker, accidentally to death; whereupon both factions, the Bolshevik and the Fascist, claim him as a martyr.

The symbol, perhaps an accidental one, was, however, significant as a prophecy of Italy, and not of Italy alone, in the years to come. It was not an accident that this author by his experience and knowledge was prepared better than some others to stand by the tradition, literary and political, of the Risorgimento, opposing it to the coming perversion. But he was isolated and powerless, and a prisoner of circumstances. He was also a prisoner of himself: namely, of a hopeless effort to conciliate his obedience to what Carlyle might have called the nearest duty with his final duty toward the future of Italy and of humanity at large, his permanence in his country and in his daily task with his spiritual citizenship in a world of better thoughts and facts. This he tried, protecting his conscience in the protest of an unyielding silence which was obdurate indeed; and no lure or threat could prevail upon it, not even when his classroom was invaded and the students who had repulsed the aggressors were subjected for months to the torment of a secret trial. But that kind of resistance proved as ineffec-

tive as it was adamant, except for the result of exposing his friends and of consuming several of the numerable years which nature allots to the individual, in a struggle both tragic and futile: until the increasing pressure of attempted bribery and actual menace, together with the inner warning that truth and goodness cannot be defended with silence alone, drove him, reluctant, into self-chosen renunciation and exile.

Exile was in any case self-chosen. No such punishment was or could have been codified in the Fascist or Nazi law; since when the state banishes a citizen legally it acknowledges his right to live as a separate entity, while the Fascist tenet, later translated by Nazism, drums over and over again: "Nothing against the state; nothing without the state; everything within the state." Therefore the dissenter, like the consenter, belonged for his lifetime to the national community, or to the One; and his only alternative, like the galley slave's, was to serve or to perish, unless he chose, as a *fuoruscito* or runaway, to take his risks. Nevertheless, many such escapes were carried out, either with the technique of a long-spun design imperilling perhaps the plotter's truthfulness and honour, or by a daring passage of the border under the rifles of the militiamen patrolling glaciers and coast. The travails, moral and physical, endured during the exodus, were a prelude to what awaited them abroad: in the best of cases a long-protracted struggle in circumstances bewilderingly new, even if the land of refuge where they happened to strand was America, the most generous of countries.

Not all those who remained at home can be rightly censured; a decision of self-exile could not possibly have been expected, for instance, of Croce: the aged scholar, used to the inspiration of his large library, to the familiarity of a group of disciples, to the well-mastered language in which he with untiring fertility wrote his essays and books, or to relaxation in the humorous Neapolitan dialect which he had spoken and heard from childhood. His position was unique, being that of the most influential literary personality in Italy since the death of Carducci and of the most famed

Italian abroad, at least in the scholarly world, since the days perhaps of Galileo. Comforted by this prestige and by whatever immunity or power was left in his economic sufficiency and in his title of Senator, he tried to rally an intellectual opposition against Fascism. A manifesto, seemingly philosophical but intrinsically political, endorsed by a few score of signatures, found its way through the haze of dawning tyranny. It did not, however, shake the regime; and the signatories, grimly watched and marked, as it were, with a scarlet letter, were unable now to find any security of peace and bread unless they volunteered humiliations and penances often protracted for years. The same unwritten punishment befell those who, in June 1925, when the screw of oppression had not yet been given its final turn, signed a declaration in behalf of Salvemini, who was held in prison but who soon after, unexpectedly acquitted, fled abroad without a passport. Several among the signatories of this latter manifesto had not meant a political protest; they esteemed the citizen and historian, and plainly believed that it was permissible for other citizens to take the witness stand in favour of a defendant and that a Catholic state would never abjure the Catechism that lists visits to prisoners among the works of charity.

Greater philosophers than Croce, from Socrates to Leibniz, had failed to make their political doctrines workable in the contingencies of their days; nor had the prophets prevailed upon the kings and the mob. But apart from the truism that the light of superior truth takes longer than the current season to reach this low earth, there were more immediate reasons to account for Croce's political failure. Until 1924 he had more or less heartily supported Fascism, and expected from it, somehow or other, the renovation of the country: an error which he had shared with other men as respectable as he, but the roots of which, in his case, lay in the very core of his philosophical belief.

After the short-lived Socialism of his early youth he had gone over, practically, to a resolute conservatism which even enabled him, during the municipal elections of 1914 at Naples, to head the

coalition of the conservative parties, unfortunately called *Fascio dell' Ordine*, against the leftist bloc; while theoretically and no less resolutely he embraced the Machiavellian theory of the state, as German philosophy had further elaborated it and as he definitively shaped it, in an intention substantially similar to that of Mosca and Pareto, thinkers whom he disliked for other and not very relevant motives. This theory contends that political activity is a separate faculty of the human mind, autonomous and thoroughly independent of ethics and logic, not subject to moral or religious approval, but to the test of success alone: in other and well-known words, a thing of might and not of right. At the start of the war he sided with the Italian Germanophiles and urged Italian neutrality: partly because his sensitive soul, regardless of any doctrinal admission, loathed bloodshed, but partly also because his unbending mind believed in the superiority of German philosophy and in the right of Prussian might. At the end of the war he joined the Italian Nationalists, although without surrendering his own free thought by formal enlistment in the party. He minimized Wilsonianism, Neo-Mazzinianism, and the League of Nations, as sorry remnants of a Masonic and eighteenth-century mentality which he had always hated. Already he had announced the "death of Socialism"; now he stressed national differences, such as those "between English and Russians, Italians and Croats, Christians and Turks," almost treating them as immortal or at any rate beneficial essences of history. He scorned again and again the idea of "state as justice," upholding the state as force, and ultimately deciding that politics cannot "be treated as ethics, whereas politics (this is the plain truth) is politics, just politics, and nothing else but politics; or, if you want me once more to repeat the tenet and comparison that are dear to me, the morality of politics consists wholly and only in being excellent politics, as the morality of poetry, whatever the incompetents may say, consists uniquely in being excellent poetry."

The core of his philosophy consisted of neo-idealism, which in its turn is summarized in the Hegelian dogma that "all that is

rational is real, and all that is real is rational." Unfortunately not only nationalism, with its bacchanal of blind hatred, was real; but Fascism too, with its stupefying authority. It was, consequently, rational; and the success of Mussolini, success being the only test that validates political happenings, was tantamount to a kingly anointment performed by the Goddess History through her idealistic high-priests.

Frivolous sentimentalism alone could deny the foundation of truth on which the Machiavellian theory reposes. That political forces tend to work by themselves according to their particular nature and apart from any moral qualification of their aims, is correct; in other words, a political science of that kind has its legitimate place in descriptive sociology considered as a branch of the natural sciences. But man, while growing within the tangle of nature, unabatingly strives to outgrow his origin, and the conflict between his servitude to biological necessity and the freedom of his will, or, as it might be put, the contrast between man's destiny and man's destination, is the very feature that distinguishes human history from natural history, lifting the intention of the former against and above the bondage of the latter. It may be accurate that poetic imagination and intellectual knowledge are fundamentally distinct, and that a similar rift parts the field of economic and political action from the zone of moral order; but an idea of man's unity, truer than whatever may actually happen in the train of centuries, overbridges the breach, and the inference rises from the conflict that some day politics may or must be as ethical as ethics itself, or more plainly, that the political class will be a dim remembrance of the past, as the castes of magicians and the aristocracies of head-hunters are now for us, regardless of the support that such institutions found once in the laws of nature. The philosopher, therefore, who eloquently sides with things as they are and overlooks or ridicules things as they ought to be, ceases to be a philosopher and steps down, if anywhere, to the level of mere statements of facts.

He does not even step safely to that level. Although the ful-

filment of man's unity is conceivable nowhere except in an indefinite future or perhaps in the timeless world of pure ideas, the presence of the ideal is operative, and increasingly so, in the actual happenings of history. True, a moral or religious purpose proves harmful to the full bloom of economic will and political power; but whenever these latter seem to have taken hold of their full freedom as awarded by their original instincts, an intelligible Nemesis seems to creep in, avenging the ignored deities. It is legitimate for a Machiavelli or Machiavellian to scoff at the stupid friar Savonarola. "Disarmed prophets crumble." But armed bandits too. And when this Nemesis has had her due, and might without right has fallen more stupidly than had right without might, no choice is left to the Machiavelli or Machiavellian except between carrying on and dying, as Machiavelli did, in delirious idolatry for his darling Cesare Borgia whom not even success put above the friar, or giving vent to an emotional distaste for which reason and knowledge have no use. An analogous choice was laid before such Italian philosophers as had scorned Wilsonians, Mazzinians, and all prophetic souls. Now they had Mussolini, whom, as far as things went, success put far above those windbags in the realm of politics that is "politics, just politics, and nothing else but politics." Why did they not take him? Croce did not.

If his opposition to Fascism had been nothing more than the reaction of an elderly gentleman, used to freedom and power and now forced to bend under a stronger and more fortunate will, if Croce's behaviour had to be explained merely as another instance of the well-known restlessness of barons when absolute monarchies rise, it would lack any moral prestige and would scarcely be worth mentioning. It had prestige, and acquired a place in history, because æsthetic disgust and moral indignation were among its most forceful components. On the other hand, the politics of a philosopher cannot become effective unless his politics and his philosophy are in agreement. Now, all the books and essays of Croce had played into the hand of Mussolini, and no substantial objection to Fascism and Nationalism was visible



in a theory idolizing the state as the embodiment of the divine, accepting all the happenings of history as judgments of God, and contending that the nation is the ultimate dialectical synthesis of individual and universal or, as it were, the highest peak from which the individual is allowed to contemplate the universal. If that is so, Fascism is right, at least until it crumbles, or even later, if the Machiavellian philosopher likes to be as pathetically obdurate as Machiavelli was about Cesare Borgia. If Fascism is wrong even in the years of its triumphs, then all Machiavellian and Crocean philosophy is wrong, and the duty of the philosopher is to discard it openly, acknowledging the permanent value of such unarmed prophets as Dante or Savonarola, as Mazzini or Wilson. But this course was almost as distasteful for Croce as a surrender to Mussolini would have been, and he avoided both, depriving his political attitude of whatever support it might have found in the fervour of a personal innovation, shifting very slowly toward a new liberalism and Europeanism which he painstakingly tried to keep in accord with his former philosophy, and clinging to the dogmatic continuity of his personality which did not allow him to admit that once in his life he had been theoretically or practically wrong. This middle or double course preserved his pride, while it did not increase his practical influence; since the influence of a moral leader is a function of his personal humility, and a convert does not make many converts if he does not confess his own conversion. The dwindling church of Croce's orthodox followers, however, liked his way. Addicts of absolute authority as most Italians are, they wanted to believe that their leader is and was always right: a tenet in which they enthusiastically rested as Catholics do in the infallibility of the Pope and Fascists in the norm that "Mussolini is always right," their only advantage, not to be underestimated, being in the fact that Croce is a better man than Mussolini and a better mind than the Pope.

In the world of events the strife between the tyrant and the philosopher materialized in one episode when late at night a band of rogues invaded the latter's venerable house, damaged a few

books, and thereupon withdrew. The assault, philosophically resisted by Croce and his family, was never to be repeated. Mussolini measured from the world-wide indignation the world-wide significance of Croce's name, and visualized the danger of making of him a Matteotti or an exile. Croce on the other hand saw the impossibility of combating Fascism openly, unless he wanted, as he did not, to go. The same technique, with the same results, was tried and abandoned shortly afterwards when Toscanini was bloodily beaten as a punishment and warning for his having refused to conduct the Fascist anthem. He was forced to flee from Bologna to Milan; drilled mobs insulted his family; his and his family's passports were confiscated by the police. Then the maestro notified Mussolini that he could manage to send somebody secretly to Switzerland to spread the news why and how he was unable to fulfil his engagements as a conductor abroad; whereupon, the next day, the passports were brought back to the maestro's home by very courteous officials. Ferrero, subjected to similar ordeals, chose permanent exile as soon as the way of escape opened to him; but even the two, Toscanini and Croce, who shrank before the bitterness or perhaps the futility of final separation from their country, thereby renouncing the weapon of public and unrestricted contradiction, have their place in the outline of a future resurgence: like rocks of steadfastness pointing to a higher sphere if not like lighthouses overpowering the obscurity. The negative freedom, at least the freedom of keeping silent and, more than that, of intimating the implications of their silence, which they won by the courage of their resistance with the support of their international fame, acted and still acts as an admonition and an inspiration in the unanimity of conformism and shame. Their absence from the Fascist chorus is a question-mark for the Italian youth; and the official answer that their solitude is nothing but the revolt of their personal pride does not sound convincing to all. Many among Italian historians and philosophers are somehow or other disciples of Croce, whose indirect influence reaches far beyond the limits of his small orthodox

school. A certain number of them tried to keep aloof from the contagion of perversion and lie; obscurity and modesty have protected their recesses from the searchlight of Fascist police and propaganda. The subjects of their studies are chosen as a rule in fields as remote as possible from the attention of the barbarians who have laid waste Italy; and although their objections to the present regime are necessarily cryptic, there is no better sign of life in the otherwise dead country than the secret meaning of their speculation and scholarship. The presence of Croce has been a comfort to these hermits of civilization; he has helped them with deeds or words; and none of his printed or spoken words, so many, is more deserving of fame than those which he used to appease young people asking his advice in the distress of their consciences and in the fetters of economic servitude: "Work for culture. He who works for culture works against Fascism."

The other leader of neo-idealism, Giovanni Gentile, became the official philosopher of Fascism. Economic determinism has its ready-made explanation in the fact that he, unlike Croce, was an offspring of the petty bourgeoisie and a poor professor, to whom tyranny, while withholding power from the powerful Croce, had much to offer. Whatever elements of secondary truth may be contained in the brutality of this motivation it must be stressed again that the intellectual system of neo-idealism, with its identification of ideal and real, had no fundamental objection against the reality of Fascism. Gentile, as a philosopher, was more consistent than Croce and his acceptance of Fascism is dialectically flawless. The diatribes between the two, who had given for over twenty years a classic example of tender friendship in collaboration, were among the sorriest episodes in the barbarization of Italy: Croce submerging in a foam of invectives whatever his acknowledging kindness had thought and said about the personality and work of his companion; the latter waving, however metaphorically, the Fascist bludgeon in the face of him who had been his elder brother. Not that all feeling perished in Gentile's naturally sensitive heart; in

several cases he tried as best he could to balk persecution and injustice; and when opportunity was at hand he dared to use whatever influence he had with Mussolini, in favour of hounded intellectuals and languishing prisoners. But the logic of the situation and of the choice he had made was stronger than such desultory returns to charity and reason; until the advancing age and the fickleness of the despot withdrawing his patronage made of Gentile's career, as fortunate externally as it was inwardly a failure, another instance of the general melancholy fogging the country. His numerous school fell in two parts: the plain Fascists and the Fascist-Catholics. There was no fundamental objection in neo-idealism to this latter issue. Whenever the mind is virtually empty, any kind of superstition or authoritarianism rushes in to fill the vacuum.

It was Gentile who first uncovered the moral weakness of the Italian intelligentsia and, perhaps involuntarily, showed the way to Mussolini. In 1923, when Fascism was still confused and hesitating and very far from developing a systematic tyranny, the philosopher, as a supposedly liberal Minister of Education in the cabinet of coalition headed by Mussolini, conceived the plan of enacting without delay a plan of educational reform which he and Croce had long kept in mind and many features of which were technically good. He did not like the lengthiness of debates and the prospective opposition of many professors; therefore he forced the hand of Mussolini, obtaining decrees which suspended their privileges and immunities and put their destinies in the hand of the minister. No faculty dared to resist. Mussolini, however slowly, learned the lesson. But it was Gentile again who, at the close of this process, inspired by the desire of making life difficult for those among Croce's followers who still held university professorships, suggested to Mussolini the law compelling all university professors to take a Fascist oath. This time the despot wavered at least two years; his usual awe before the mysterious world of the intellect made him fearful of a mass insurrection,

At last in 1931 the philosopher, although he had long ceased to be a member of the Cabinet, had his way. The result proved that he had been right. Thirteen alone refused the oath.

As soon as possible the law was copied and enforced in Germany and in some minor countries, until a number of American states adopted it in slightly modified form. The assumption according to which an extorted oath of allegiance is meaningless and does not interfere with the real life of those who take it is another democratic delusion. What happened in Italy is exemplary. Few professors were Fascists at heart; the great majority, tamed by the habitual legalism of their long career or pushed by a dire economic necessity, signed the document against their better conscience, whose voice they hushed with the pretence that a compulsory lie does not bind the liar, or even with the familiar quotation from the legend of Galileo, who while apparently yielding to the Inquisitors and distinctly asserting that the earth is the immovable centre of the universe, murmured in a low irrepressible voice: "Eppur si muove"—and yet the earth does revolve. The university presidents, instructed by the Government, helped to appease their doubts, minimizing the formality and assuring them that after it they would be let alone. They were not, however; and few months had elapsed after the oath when they were asked to apply for regular membership in the Fascist party. Those who were recalcitrant were placed in the dilemma of either confessing that theirs had been a false oath or, if the oath was true, of taking its moral consequences. Their hesitations were short; whereupon, after having received the membership cards which implied a second oath pledging them to live and die for Fascism and Mussolini, they were ordered to don the black shirt, at least on graduation days and in similar exercises, and to spend their scholarly eloquence on behalf of the Fascist revolution whenever political authorities wanted them to do so. Most often the orators were picked from among those professors whose past made them more suspected of lukewarm and superficial Fascist faith. The ardour of their official rhetoric was expected to be inversely proportional

to the strength of their inward conviction; but it was sensible to hope that while conquering the audience the orators might have an effect also upon themselves.

Even without developments of this kind the lie does bind the liar; nor would so many commonwealths have imitated the Fascist invention if they had not recognized in it a psychological achievement, or, as it were, a superior blend of Jesuitism and Pragmatism. Men do not like to live with split and disturbed consciences, and their natural inclination is to think what they say and to be as they seem to be. Men do not like either to be taken for fools or cowards; and it was an escape for many scholars and teachers in Italy and elsewhere to plead not guilty before the tribunal of contemporaneity and posterity, transfiguring their bad faith into a good one or the sad necessity of their slavery into the virtue of a free choice. Many of them rationalized the oath and became interested in the permanent triumph of Fascism, seeking in it the justification of their behaviour. A few years or months after the formality of the oath the whole of the Italian higher learning was, body and soul, in the hands of Mussolini, the school-master.

Thus all strongholds of Italian intelligence were razed to the ground: because they had not been strong at all.

## *March on the Church*

**T**HE stronghold most imposing to the sight had been and was the Catholic Church, this living body of Christ. No challenge to Christian ethics and belief had ever been so ruthless as the Fascist theory of government and war.

A fight to the finish would have seemed unavoidable between the two powers.

Undoubtedly there was and is a Christian soul in Catholicism. This is the source of charity in its militant orders, of humility and virtue in its army of saints. Its dogmatic philosophy, however superseded by modern thought, fused in secret harmony the principles, both morally imperative, of predestination and free will, of grace and works. Even its mythology and ritual, although luxuriantly exceeding the needs of a pure religious feeling, united in an astonishing structure the beauty of classic and popular imagination with the intent of the Gospel.

But there was another soul in Catholicism: the Roman political heritage. The fight of these two souls is all the history of the Church.

Life, Christian life, in it was thwarted by the ever-resurgent ghost of ancient imperialism. The plan of unifying the world both spiritually and politically under the Roman hierarchy, although occasionally shrouded in clever silence was never abandoned; and hundreds of defeats were met with dogged tenacity. In a larger setting the tragedy of the Church repeated and projected the tragedy of the Italian nation. Both entities were driven mad by a necromantic obsession, by the impossible desire of resurrecting what was dead; both faced discomfiture as a penalty for not having understood that the immortal spirit of Rome, the ineradicable human will to unify mankind, cannot abide within the walls of Rome—it did not even abide there during the latter period of the Roman Empire—and that Catholicity, the universality of man, must break at last the fences of any local or sectional Catholicism.

At the crossroads of the Renaissance the Roman Church was unable to realize that Humanism and Reformation were the real continuers of what is imperishably creative in Christianity. It tightened the defences, it stiffened the dogma; the very word of Counter-Reformation pictured the situation of a beleaguered power, which the Church accepted from that moment on, shrink-

ing into itself and making of Catholicity a sect. When Liberalism, the legitimate offspring of Humanism and Reformation, celebrated three centuries later its revolutionary victories which seemed as final as they were sweeping, the Church did not change its method of self-protection, and answered the armed menace with the metaphorical thunderbolt of its anathemas. Had Machiavelli been there he would have repeated that "unarmed prophets crumble." At least to some extent he would have been wrong again.

Liberal Italy was practically at the gates of Rome when Pius IX promulgated the Syllabus, an unqualified condemnation of modern thought and politics. This happened in 1864. Six years later liberal Italy entered the city; the temporal power of the Popes, which had lasted over a thousand years, came to an end; and the event, however trifling from a diplomatic and military angle, assumed a world-wide importance in the conclusiveness of its meaning. But only a few weeks before the Catholic-liberal skirmish at the gates of Rome the Church had proclaimed the dogma of Papal Infallibility, thus raising the highest spire of authority above the ruins. Pius IX died in 1878; Leo XIII, the first of the four Popes elected in self-chosen imprisonment, started his reign by the encyclical *Æterni Patris*, which appeared in the following year, summoning the spirit of medieval philosophy against modern rationalism and intuitionism. This was the formal inauguration of Neo-Scholasticism. Meanwhile the same pontiff began to explore the possibility of the Church's striking new roots in the new ground of contemporary society: which in his opinion should have happened by competing with Socialism and opposing to its materialism a Christian democracy founded on a moderate interpretation of the Gospel. Political and economic progressivism in the framework of intellectual and dogmatic reaction is mere nonsense; the momentary stratagem, however, confused many minds and won to the Pope a mixed following in Italy and abroad, which promised to the Church some strange sort of revival as a political power. In that confusor



Modernism unexpectedly throve. It was an extemporaneous attempt, although one pregnant with potential promise for the future, at reforming the Church from inside, with the purpose not only of equating its political practice with democracy but also of fitting its religious creed to the requirements of modern philosophy and science. Leo, a sophisticated mind, looked keenly at the perplexing brood; but his successor, Pius X, almost a peasant, saw promptly what the beast was. It was the well-known snake of heresy, in renovated skin. He crushed its head. The encyclical *Pascendi* of 1907 cut short any intercourse between the Church and the world, political and intellectual, of our day, re-instating in its full value the Syllabus and bringing to a climax a period in the history of Catholicism which future historians may call the second Counter-Reformation.

All this seemed nothingness to liberal onlookers who in the glum resistance and in the impotent labour of the Church saw but the premonitory signs of its slow death. They too, although supposedly liberal, were in the tangles of dogmatic thinking, because they believed in the unarrestable course of progress, a triumphal car on the highroad of time. The apparent results of the World War seemed once again to show that their childish faith had seen the truth. All hopes of the Church in a peace of compromise which might have increased its mediatory authority, or even in a victory of the Central Empires with a resurrection in some form of the Papal State, had been flatly defeated. The last surviving among the great Catholic powers of the past, the Habsburg monarchy, had fallen to pieces, under the blows especially of heretic Italy. In Paris during the negotiations for the general peace it was the Church, alarmed by circumstances so unfortunate, that took the road to Canossa. Between Orlando, the liberal Premier, and the representative of the Pope an accord was almost fully drafted and agreed upon which should have ended the half-century-long quarrel between nation and Church, bringing to Italy the acknowledgment of its rights and conquests from the institution which had most relentlessly op-

posed them, and giving in return to the Church insubstantial advantages which by no means qualified the freedom and sovereignty of the lay state. But Orlando wished to carry home this laurel together with all his other expected trophies and, having been denied Dalmatia, he rather inexplicably shelved also the treaty with the Vatican, which remained a secret and ineffective scheme, as if the clash with Wilson and the failure to obtain either the territories coveted by Nationalism or the sensible peace which he would have liked had made of him a defeatist to whose embittered temper any partial success was distasteful. Things went on between Italy and the Church as they had for nearly fifty years, with the remarkable new feature, however, that the Vatican definitively waived the rule, a passive protest against accomplished facts, which had prohibited the Catholics from taking part in the political life of the nation. They flowed openly now to the polls, and the new-born Popular party grew almost overnight to adult size. It was a Socialist body with a clerical soul, revolutionary and debonair: an awkward, pathetically amphibious freak.

Then Fascism came up, with its atheistic autocracy. Italy was lost to Liberalism and to Christianity as well. Achille Ratti, the fourth and last of the Popes crowned in captivity, saw this fateful event almost at the start of his reign. He was elected in February 1922, as the successor of Benedict XV, and chose the name of Pius XI, almost indicating thereby his purpose of following in the footsteps of Pius IX, the Pope of the Syllabus, and of Pius X, the one who had annihilated Modernism. In the same year he heard from his splendid prison the tramp of the Fascist hordes pouring into the sacred city. Shortly afterwards the Popular party, this ingenious Trojan horse that the Papacy had smuggled into the liberal citadel, broke under the fist of Mussolini, and its splinters were scattered to the four winds.

It is hardly exaggerated to assume that while other Popes had personally been in a worse situation, never had the Catholic Church as a whole seemed so forlorn. This desperate appearance

does not give an entirely truthful image of things as they really were; but there was in it a portion of truth which accounts in part for the behaviour of the new Pope in the ensuing months and years.

His economic origins lay in the lower middle bourgeoisie of Lombardy, a class and a region that had been industriously tilled by Fascism. Like most of those who took a decisive part in the events of these decisive years, he belonged to the intellectual élite. He was a humanist and Latinist; he had been a climber of mountains in the enthusiastic spirit, say, of a Petrarch, a contemplator of nature with the elation, perhaps, of a reader of Fogazzaro if not of d'Annunzio, a competent librarian in Milan, a clever diplomatist, a political archbishop and cardinal in his Milan again during the rise of Fascism. The network of his social relations had brought him much closer to the upper classes and to the technique of government than to the suffering many and to the practice of humble piety, and his ideal of a Pope certainly was more similar to the mentality of a Pius II than to the spirituality of the Catacombs. In the wake of the least pagan among his forerunners in the Renaissance, he had made a blend of Christianity and classicism, of Catholicism and patriotism. This latter concordance was in the nature of things; since it is beyond doubt that the Catholic Church is to a great extent an Italian institution, the most enduring and successful, regardless of its shortcomings, of all the political creations in which the genius of the nation has expressed itself. It also was generally assumed that it was the Catholic Church which in centuries of decadence and servitude had preserved for the Italians a share of influence and power in the government of the world. But this national quality of Catholicism was effective only as long as it remained subconscious, or, in other words, only as long as Catholicism kept on believing itself identical with Christianity and Universality. In this regard the antinational conduct of the recent Popes from Pius IX to Benedict XV had been an asset to the prestige of the Church, and there was a deadly danger in

peeling the universally Christian rind of the institution from its Italian or Roman pulp and showing the latter naked to the unsuspecting masses.

Cardinal Ratti, however, seemed unaware of the danger, and not long before his assumption of the papal throne had candidly stated that only an Italian who has lived abroad is able to measure the immense value of Catholicism for the Italian national prestige. Mussolini, in his turn, when nothing more than a newly elected member of the Chamber of Deputies, had acknowledged with almost identical words the immense contribution of Catholicism to the pride of the Italian nation. The two declarations belong approximately to the same time; and the editorial office of the *Popolo d'Italia* had been even nearer to the archbishopric of Milan than Palazzo Venezia was now to the Vatican. There was no reason why the two men, whom a parallel destiny had brought in the same year to Rome, should not come together: no reason, except in Christ; but Christianity was by no means the decisive factor in Pope Ratti's mind. He was sure that he loved Italy; it is sure that he hated democracy and Socialism. All other feelings in him were literal and conventional; and the ruthless Antichristianity of Fascism, which would have horrified a Francis or a Savonarola, was nothing to him or perhaps just another opportunity for a routine victory of the Holy Ghost.

For the rest, the authoritarian theory of Fascism played into the hands of Catholic authoritarianism. It was quite clear that the Grand Council of Fascism was an imitation of the Sacred College, that the rules for the succession to the Duce were analogous to those for the succession of the Popes, and that the fundamental pattern of the Fascist state, rather than in Plato's Republic or in the Venetian oligarchy, was to be sought and found in the hierarchy of Catholicism. This wonderful onslaught on democracy and free thought had not been made possible by such uprooted individuals as Gobineau and Nietzsche and d'Annunzio alone; it had been Pius IX, the Pope of the Syllabus, who standing firm on the ground of tradition had given the example, shak-

ing Samson-like the pillars of the modern temple; and perhaps behind Mussolini the anarchist and Mussolini the godless autocrat there was, operative although hidden, the educational complex of his forefathers, who had been papal subjects for many generations. In a moment of irrepressible glee Pius XI was to embrace him spiritually, calling him "the man sent by Providence."

The bargaining lasted months and years. It was concluded in 1929 with the Treaties of the Lateran. The Pope received the palaces of the Vatican with their backyards: a temporal power in a nutshell; but the principle was safe and the personal ambition satisfied. The national celebration of the date on which liberal Italy had destroyed the Papal State was abolished. In return, all the rest of Rome and Italy was recognized as legitimately belonging to the lay state, and even the name of Rome disappeared from the official documents of Catholicism, which had been the Roman Church and from that moment was the Vatican City. But while the Church became ancillary to atheistic tyranny, tyranny rewarded it by making it supreme in the elementary cell of society, the family. Marriage and divorce—now at last, although surreptitiously, introduced into Italy as a welcome source of revenue for the Church—became a monopoly of the Vatican, and the priest lent his hand to the squadrist in the task of perverting domestic virtues to the purpose of national violence and international anarchy. The intellectual life of the country, already agonizing in the gas chamber of Fascist censorship, had its coup de grâce from the spirit of the Inquisition, and over her new black shirt Italy donned her old black gown.

To be sure, it was or seemed perfect business for both contracting parties. Mussolini, having long since abandoned or indefinitely postponed the juvenile ambition of destroying Christianity and dethroning God, must have felt satisfied with drafting the Church into his service. On the other side, it was an achievement to have taken the Church out of a perilous isolation, giving it a new foothold or *pou-sto* on earth. As for the angelic Pope

who, beyond dogma and outer discipline, will lead humanity back to evangelical purity and forward to divine perfection, perhaps he has no place except in the mystic prophecy of Gioacchino of Floris. Meanwhile the shrewd Pope who, having lost Austria-Hungary and all the rest, was able to make up the losses, in a world without chances, by conquering somehow his own country and taking a share in its political power, deserved worldly felicitations. The financial clauses of the compact, diverting a substantial rivulet of Fascist gold into the gaping Vatican treasury, manifested at once the ugliness and the reasonableness of the sacro-profane trade.

Troubled mood followed the mutual exhilaration, and remorsees blew up from the moral morass. They were of different natures. What Mussolini wanted was to assure himself and the others that his autocratic authority remained as undivided as it was before and that, in the alliance of Fascism with Catholicism, Fascism was the horseman and Catholicism the horse. In an ambitious Parliamentary speech outlined for him by a journalist versed in many sciences he explained that Christianity, which otherwise would have vanished, a sect among others in tiny Palestine, was merely a symbol of Roman unity and Roman empire; and as to the territory which he had severed from the national state and returned to the Pope, he very wittily contended that it was just large enough to bury the temporal power. The Pope disliked both the political philosophy and the theology of the speech; he disliked even more vehemently the trick of bringing home to him that he had been the fool in the trade; and his personal vanity felt hurt more painfully than his religious belief. Moreover, he and many around him realized the danger of having tied the destiny of the Church to the future of a national faction, and an un-Christian faction at that; neither did such devices as the Pope's condemnation of French nationalists (a band of harmless screamers) while hallowing Nationalism all-powerful in Italy, seem alibis to be wholly counted on for the day of reckoning. It would have been highly desirable to keep

the palaces, the money, the political safety, while winning back spiritual freedom and Christian authority. An attempt was made. Incompatibility, soon evident, in the field of education and the family, where the Church monopolized marriage and sexual morals but the state controlled the children, debauching them to atheistic pride and hatred, offered the platform for the showdown of the two mights. It was short and final, in the spring of 1931.

This time the unarmed prophet crumbled. It was now too late for him to threaten anything but editorials and bulls. The antagonist had the real weapons which he had brandished quite successfully six years earlier against the national opposition. There was nothing to hope for except martyrdom and glory, and the vicar of Christ promptly surrendered. From that moment on, after an exchange of heated words, those of Mussolini supported by threats of sexual scandals, later imitated in Germany, and by thundering demonstrations of the Fascist youth while those of the Pope were supported by nothing, Pius XI became the chaplain of a despot frankly avowing his disbelief in any god but himself.

To be sure, while Fascism exulted at having hired the service of Catholicism so cheaply, Catholicism clung secretly to its own long-spun plan. It was and is the unshakable conviction of those who live within the walls of the Vatican, and not of them alone, that everything passes but the Church remains, and that all its defeats redound to final victory. In the present case the idea behind the self-enslavement is that some day or other Mussolini must die and Fascism disintegrate. That day no organized force will be left in the country except the Church; and the Church, with the support of foreign powers hating the outlook of revolution and civil war in such a neuralgic spot as Italy, will take the succession of Fascism. True, the temporal state of the Popes, killed in 1870, was buried in 1929 in the speck of earth ceded by Mussolini to Pius; but only buried seeds do sprout, and from little acorns tall oaks grow. Some day perhaps the oak of the

reborn temporal power will overshadow all Italy, and the dream cherished by so many a pope in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance will at long last come true.

The opposite hypothesis, however, is at least equally plausible from a logical angle, and more in accord with the visible trend of history. It is the hypothesis that Roman Fascism and Roman Catholicism must win or lose together, and that a conceivable future will wreck this second Counter-Reformation and bring forth a human religion including the permanent elements of Christianity and embracing all cultivated races and all superior creeds. For the time being it is official Catholicism that serves the Fascist purpose, rather than the contrary, as those living within the Vatican fancy for a time to come. It has stripped itself of any Christian and universal character, renouncing its primogeniture for a mess of pottage and accepting the role of a gentile religion pivoted around one nation, nay, around one faction of that nation. The collusion became inextricable at the end of the Ethiopian crisis in the spring and summer of 1936. The Pope, who had sided almost openly with the aggressor against the victim and with warring anarchy against the covenant—intrinsically Christian—of the League of Nations, quite openly praised and blessed the “great and good people” that had conquered its empire. His bishops, cardinals, and apostolic vicars, from Milan to Addis Ababa, commemorated in public speeches the “religious significance” of the March on Rome while exalting “the new Roman Empire which will carry the cross of Christ across the world under the guidance of this marvellous man, the Duce,” the man of Providence.

But these later and final developments were virtually included in the catastrophe of 1931, when the belated resistance of the Church collapsed before the timely threat of Fascism. The vision at the close of Dante’s *Purgatory*, where the Church appears as a prostitute in the arms of a symbolic giant, was now actual truth, although no real giant had taken part in the remarkable event which Fate had performed through less-than-middle-sized actors.



Therefore the date 1931, when the black tide surmounted the propylæa of St. Peter's, is even more significant than 1925, when Parliament and democracy had succumbed. The March on Rome, in 1922 hardly more than a provincial masquerade, rose finally to the dignity of a world drama, and another page was turned in the history of Italy and not of Italy alone.

## *The Murdered Is Guilty*

NOW into all the centres of the Italian brain, from philosophy to religion, from the press to the university, had been injected a stupefying essence, making of the nation a vocal robot. The few anchorites living and thinking in solitude, protected by their very humbleness, were overlooked by the Government because they were unknown to the people. What mattered was the mass phenomenon. The children, brought up in tribal mysticism, learned history in primers presenting all heroes of the past and all nations of the world as mere foretokens of the one hero and the one nation that were to come, Mussolini and Mussolini's Italy; they marched on Sundays, in black shirts or skirts, carrying real rifles from the age of eight and singing songs of hatred at an even earlier age; and it soon became practically impossible for parents and friends to find in any store a toy that was not a miniature gun or tank or other implement of war. As for the grown-ups, any velleity of dissent was ruled out by the fearfulness of the bread-winner, menaced, when not with violence, with political excommunication followed by economic ruin; in other terms, the family, this

holy unholy institution which was and still is the only real foundation of Italian society, supported with all the obscurity of its weight the edifice of autocracy. Censorship, not only muzzling any public expression but also prying into the mail and tapping the telephone, slowly accustomed the millions to wily restraint even when conversing by the fireplace, even when talking to themselves in the soliloquy of the soul; and the gesture of the walkers turning their heads lest eavesdroppers tread their footprints became almost a feature of the race.

Not fear alone, however, was the driving force; nor would Fascism have celebrated its unprecedented victory had not the criminal desire of the one or the few found a fertile soil in the hereditary folly of a half-intellectual leading class, still dreaming of national pre-eminence in a pluralistic world and of Roman centripetality in this expanding universe.

Almost obviously Mussolini had said: "One cannot deprive a nation of liberty, unless one gives her glory." They gave up all honour and joy of life, in the expectation of strutting in primacy, slaves but enslavers too.

A novelist of our era has written a story entitled: "Not the Murderer, the Murdered Is Guilty." This applies somehow to Italy and her conqueror.

Such mutual processes of induced ruin and suicidal complicity have been described by scientists in the field of human and of animal behaviour as well. "Even among bees," wrote Havelock Ellis, treating of individual and collective hysteria, "it is said that when a band of brigand bees enter a strange hive to despoil it of honey, the owners of the hive are themselves sometimes so carried away by the suggestion of rapine that they will even go to the robbers' side and assist in destroying the result of their own labour."

## The World Considers Fascism

**T**HAT a page or two had been turned in the history of Italy was clear, perhaps, to everybody. Few if any realized that a turning point had been reached in the history of the world as well; and such Italian exiles as roamed around disclosing that a Fascist peril, an Italian peril, impended over the whole of Western civilization were met with a courteous smile, the meaning of which was that they, the Antifascists, thus overstating the importance of their country, were indulging in the same kind of visionary nationalism and Latin rhetoric as the Fascists at home who bragged of a third civilization with which Fascist Rome was regaling the universe.

"Go, you little smearer, it is not you who will uproot Milan." With this sentence Manzoni, in his *Betrothed*, dismisses the harmless rustic who had been suspected of spreading the black plague with some ointment of his; and a similar sentence might have expressed the general feeling about the opinion, in which alone Italian Fascists and Antifascists agreed, that Italy was changing the course of world events. "Go, little ones, it is not you who will shake the earth."

History was and still is supposed to be a play staged by an exclusive cast of great actors, comprising the English-speaking nations, Germany, and France. Two outsiders, however socially inferior, may or must occasionally be taken in. These are Russia and Japan. The others are gallery or choir; and nothing of importance ought to be allowed to happen beyond the demarcation line which a well-established tradition has drawn between first-rate nations and second-class crowd. Naturally, this is a delusion of conventionalism and conceit, and one of the salutary

results of the present crisis will be in manifesting that all classifications, national as well as economic, must fall, and that no roll call of big and small peoples can prevent great things from happening in small places.

As for Italy in particular, a well-established tradition had decided that she was a rather small place, and the textbooks from which the leading classes of the leading nations drew their information had sealed her history under the dates of 1527 and 1530, when Rome was looted and Florence brought to her knees. From that moment on there had practically been no Italian chapter in those textbooks, but only footnotes under the headings of Spain or Austria or France. The Risorgimento, half hidden in its humane modesty, had been familiar to a group of sentimentalists and specialists, and of the Italian intervention in the World War the world at large had not wanted to retain anything but the defeat of Caporetto, which fitted very well into pre-existing patterns.

"Of all the exquisite and awe-inspiring objects of the Italian countryside"—wrote Philip Guedalla as late as 1936, with a humanity than which his profundity in history is alone more conspicuous—of all those objects in that countryside "its inhabitants had been, since their emancipation, by far the least impressive. They were not asked to be impressive, because that was done for them by the background; and it was so indisputable that they had a past that it was almost an impertinence to wonder if they had a future."<sup>1</sup>

Now, when Fascism came up, it must have been, of course, another small thing in the small place. Most foreigners after a short delay of perplexity felt inclined to accept the accomplished fact, feeling that their pleasure in life was favoured by the unexpected opportunity of cancelling those confusing footnotes in the inter-chapters and of linking straightway contemporary Italy with that beloved and well-known Italy of the Renaissance. Hav-

<sup>1</sup> Philip Guedalla, *The Hundred Years*, Garden City, Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1937.

ing looked up at the commanding equestrian statues of Colleoni in Venice and Gattamelata in Padua, they might now proceed—at least in imagination—to Rome, there to enjoy the sight of a live condottiere. The latter's picture on horseback under the arch of Constantine could be had for a penny; and his grim countenance and bloodthirsty utterances, while no more dangerous to outsiders than the marmoreal gestures of the adventurers sculptured by Donatello and Verrocchio, set a perfect example of Southern amplification and Latin vitality. Whatever they had nibbled from the pages of Stendhal and of such other pitiless dilettanti cherishing in Italy the land of operatic expression and of æsthetic redundancy, now at last was present to their living eyes. There, at last, was the Italy of their heart, the Rome of their longing: a paradise for the antiquarian, with a pope, a king, and a tyrant all together, a trinity of the picturesque which no ballet composer had ever dreamt of before. That this was actual history, significant for their own destiny, rather than a tableau in the immovable scenery of the past, they could not bring themselves to believe; and the spiritual death of the Italian nation, if there had been a living Italy after the Renaissance, was no business of theirs.

No sooner had tyranny been established and the waste-basket of the Matteotti affair been incinerated than Sir Austen Chamberlain cruised in the waters of Leghorn, with Lady Chamberlain wearing the Fascist badge to please their guest of honour, the dictator of Italy. It is not misdeeds but mistakes against which society is inexorable; and it seemed now clear that none of the misdeeds committed by Fascism between 1919 and 1925 had been a real mistake. Therefore all the powerful of the earth, with the temporary exception of France—fearful lest the dagger of Mussolini might be directed at her heart—promptly showed unmistakable signs of favour to the victor of his own country. America herself settled the Italian war debt at bargain conditions, and benevolent loans flowed from Wall Street to the Fascist treasury, municipalities, and business concerns. France, hav-

ing lingered long, later joined the majority with an enthusiasm accumulated in the delay. Her Premier Laval, landing finally in Rome in January 1935, did not mind affronting the victims and prisoners when acclaiming Mussolini as the greatest man in modern Italian history.

No one contests the fact that freedom and dignity are and must be earned by the toil of each individual and society, or that "he alone deserves freedom and life who conquers them every day." These highest privileges could not have been a gift of the Western democracies to Italy; and the oppressed Italian who should have desired an armed intervention or a boycott by foreign powers against his domestic oppressors would have sinned worse against a first principle of justice than against national allegiance. It is indisputable that, if Italy wants the dignified institutions and the spiritual prosperity of France, of England, of America, she must go through the same trials and sacrifices through which these nations went; and all the lesson of the past teaches that only by her own conversion, and not by external help, can Italy recover, disentangling herself from that superstition of Roman primacy which is inextricably correlated with the penalty of actual servitude, and winning her place in a world where none, individual or nation, shall be allowed to be the first.

But no less clear is it that the neutrality or indifference of the other nations toward the collapse of Italian liberty and the catastrophe of the Risorgimento should not have degenerated into flattery and bribery of tyranny, thereby ceasing to be neutral and taking sides with the conqueror. Until 1925 Italy had been her own victim, and no outsider had shared the responsibility of her misfortune; but from that moment onward the foreign powers became the guardians of her jail, and any attempt at insurrection would have been broken by a Fascism steadily growing under the protection, financial and political, of Parliamentary and even Socialistic governments. For England, or at least for the smooth-spoken oligarchy and the tight-lipped bureaucracy ruling England, a braggart and sabre-rattling Fascist Italy was

welcome in the difficult English game of the continental balance of power: to the delicate counterpoises of which Mussolini with his Italians was supposed to bring a valuable contribution by alternately checking French arrogance and German fury. Other motives inspired revolutionary Russia, which was nice and friendly; perhaps in the expectation that Fascism might develop as a disintegrating force in capitalistic Europe, stirring somehow those stagnating waters. On the opposite side, all plutocratic groups in Western democracy, from the Rhine to the Pacific—now proselytes of their own Marxism and zealots of economic determinism and class warfare—wondered why Fascist Italy, and later all the black-brown stripe across Europe, should not be regarded as a buffer-state between their safes and Leninism. To be sure, no screen or sword could protect their sleep from the red nightmare which rose from their incurable terror and stupidity alone; but they hoped at least that Fascism, while thriving within the boundaries of its homeland, might be used in other countries as a scarecrow against riotous labour. Germany, when Hitler took it, had obvious reasons for loving Fascism both as a revered teacher and as a prospective auxiliary in a war of rapine and revenge. But in the other camp France, late and yet not too late awakened, conceived the plan of buying Italy wholesale with her condottiere. She knew that Fascism would ask a high price; she braced herself, however, to pay it, the only aim of France's Italian policy being, as a French historian confided to American ears, to "purchase immediately" Italy's neutrality if not her help when the hour struck of the unavoidable and perhaps desirable final duel between France and Germany.

Likewise in the confessional world, while the Catholics all over the world became increasingly aware that the destinies of Italian Fascism and of the Roman Church might now be irreparably linked together, the same misgiving made its way, however obscurely, into the Protestant mind, with paradoxically identical results. When the Italian monarchy had become definitively involved in Fascism all Italian Antifascism had gone

republican; according to analogy it was presumable that with the growing syncretism of Fascism and Papacy all Antifascism should grow anticlerical and antipopish. The idea that some day an Italian leftist government might ship the Pope overnight as Kemal Pasha had shipped the Caliph of Constantinople; that all the eleven thousand doors of the papal palaces might be flung open, and the Vatican City perhaps offered as a seat to a reborn League of Nations: this appalling idea was not beyond the realm of possibility. Should the vicious dream materialize in actual history, where is the commonwealth, Catholic or Protestant, anxious to be chosen as the refuge of a banished Pope, with his jeremiads and plots? Far more advisable is it for Italy's beauty and the world's peace of mind that Fascism and the Church should stay; even if a hundred years hence Italy should look as dead as Arabia with her Mecca, as moonlike as Tibet with its Dalai Lama.

## *Fascism and Tourism*

**T**HUS pampered by fairies and witches and lifted above all dangers in a Cardanic suspension made up of all the world's selfishness, fear, and greed, Fascism in the early thirties was thoroughly identified with the destiny of Italy, no fibre of whose social and intellectual system escaped the degradation. Among the innumerable accomplices of this destiny, the average tourist, alighting on his native pier with a pæan for Fascism and heralding its glory in the group of his relatives and friends, is the most entitled to the benefit of extenuating circum-



stances. He had not gone to Italy as an explorer or missionary, but only to relax and to enjoy easily whatever pleasurable aspect of life might chance under his eyes. Optimism and conformism are essentials of relaxation. He hardly knew the word *Risorgimento*, and was thoroughly ignorant of what the liberal regimes had done for Italy in the half-century between 1870 and 1920. As a rule he was too young to have been there before the World War, while at least a relative or a friend of his had had a glimpse of the Italian turmoil in the time of demobilization and readjustment after the war, which turmoil confirmed the accredited opinion that there was no Italy after the Renaissance worth speaking of except with a blend of tenderness and contempt. Now the façade of the country was as if painted anew, and the beggars had been removed from the streets perambulated by the tourist to quarters and places where no cicerone took him.

Food and climate were excellent, the rate of exchange reliable, and trains ran on time. By an understood compact between Fascism and Tourism, Italy, having been the battlefield of European armies and being now, almost no less cruelly, the arena of European diplomacies, was made furthermore a resort for cosmopolitan vacationists, with as many Italians as possible ministering to the comfort and even the caprice of the guests. If an American lady objected to the price of American cigarettes in Italy, she might obtain directly from the Duce a personal permit to import custom-free all the American cigarettes she wanted. If an English-speaking gentleman frowned on the bill of the hotel where he had last sojourned, he had simply to hand it over with his remarks and his address to the first blackshirt on the train taking him to the next circle in the Fascist paradise, a week or so thereafter to see a considerable refund flow back into his amazed wallet. The militiaman at the railway border or on the boat's gangway, whose dagger and tuft induced a shiver in the native sliding again into his national prison, was all Narcissan smile while welcoming Mr. Brisbane and waiving his right and duty of peeping into his trunks; and that gangster-like but inoffensive

attire was just another charm added to the romantic scenery along which the car *de luxe* oilily rolled.

Puzzled, and honestly so, by such rumours as he had heard about cruelty and injustice in Fascism, the sightseer would conscientiously investigate the opinion of an inn-keeper or of a shop clerk; nor was his psychological training so advanced as to notice that the inn-keeper or shop clerk, while whitewashing Fascism and hymning the Duce, kept looking askance and wondering whether the foreign intruder was not by any chance an *agent provocateur* of the secret police. For the rest, the legend, red perhaps, of Fascist injustice and cruelty was belied by the very fact that a bird sanctuary had been established on the island of Capri, in the spirit of purest Franciscanism. Another legend had it that poverty reigned in the country at large, with the gap between wages and living cost steadily increasing, and that unemployment was met either with insufficient and desultory relief or with mass enrolments in an army and a bureaucracy that were squeezing dry the moderate resources of state and people. The budget, such murmurers intimated, was sloping toward the pit of permanent deficit, and the gold reserves were dwindling, despite taxation which neared confiscation and a prohibition of exporting metal and currency which raised a Chinese wall around a dying trade. But the tourist lacked both economic training and heartfelt curiosity to inquire what elements of truth there might be in those stories; and the travel bureaux, judiciously scheduling his tours, prevented troublesome sights from interfering with his holiday mood. There was no denial that the Corporative State, in which the employers embrace the employees with such robust and loving arms, was an excellent idea; the excellence of which was not wholly curtailed by the fact, or legend, that such a state did not exist at all and that all differences between capital and labour were ironed out by Mussolini alone. Of strikes and lockouts, at any rate, there were none; and it was not the task of the tourist to ascertain how many days a factory worked during the depression (which in Fascist Italy had begun three years

ahead of the world at large) or what the workman's family ate on the other days.

It was sufficient that there was no riot or disturbance in traffic and that the people of the lower classes, at least in that province of the world, knew their betters. An improvement in highroads, transportation, steam heat, excavations, was clearly visible; and the enthusiasm of the visitor went so far as to credit Fascism with miracles of engineering or of archæological scholarship that had been achieved thirty or fifty years earlier. Had he been allowed to ascribe to Mussolini the azure sky and the shining mountains he would have done it gladly, since thankfulness is a part of happiness. Being as poorly equipped in elementary logic as he was in psychology and history, he was not arrested by the consideration that progress in gasoline stations and in house plumbing, as well as in any other branch of technology, is a common feature of our time, conspicuous in democratic as well as in Communistic and in Fascist states. He would hardly have praised constitutional monarchy as the best of governments merely because Queen Wilhelmina of Holland drained the Zuider Zee, nor would he have celebrated the Golden Gate bridge as a feat of the two-party system, or adopted Stalinism on account of the Dnieper dam. But he saw Fascism digging and building in Italy, and hence inferred that Fascism was good at least for Italy.

In the bequest of liberal Italy to Fascism one item among others had been a huge programme of land reclamation. A substantial part of this programme had been already carried out, signally in the zone of Ferrara near the mouths of the Po. But Fascism, taking the inheritance, immediately hit on the idea of shifting the centre of the programme from the remote provinces to the immediate vicinity of Rome, where political propaganda might pay astonishing returns.

There, to the Pontine marshes, was our tourist driven from his hotel; there was he shown the abysmal difference between pre-Fascist, or prehistorical, and Fascist Italy. The authorized guide knew how to diffuse in many words one single truth

which, inspired by the peculiar quality of Fascist patriotism, he might as well have served in one single sentence: "You see what a ragged Jezebel our mother Italy used to be, and what a decent being we are making of her." The tourist listened. He had not realized so far that real engineers might have been born in Italy since the days of Leonardo da Vinci. He felt at ease remembering that no such marshes were to be seen in the immediate outskirts of London or Boston, and his mildly warmed superiority complex, together with a feeling of admiration for the great man, exhaled an indistinct euphoria which made of his ride in the Campagna a perfect day. To be sure, neither in prosperity nor in sanitation would Italy ever climb the peaks of more worthy or more fortunate nations, this being partly due to the lack of natural resources (which might perhaps be made up by some colonial concession in territories where the interests of the tourist's own country were not at stake) and partly to an almost inborn laziness, which otherwise is one among many charms of the native population. The improvement, however, in Italian efficiency and discipline under Fascist guidance, and the advance toward whatever prosperity seemed compatible with the particular circumstances of the country, were obvious even to the most hurried of travellers. That the price for such advantages was liberty clouded with a drop of bitterness the limpidity of his consent. He had been brought up in the Western school of liberal thought, to the teachings of which he still devoted an unshaken faith. But apart from the consideration that he enjoyed in Italy all the liberty he needed and that only on very exceptional occasions was his daily paper stopped at the post office, apart from the endorsement of Ezra Pound, the American poet in Rapallo, who has stated: "As personal testimony to personal feeling, I feel freer here than I ever did in London or Paris," there seemed to be a necessity ordaining that all nations except his own should be confronted with a choice between liberty and decency, the latter being preferable to the former.

Another, but not last, red legend intimated that the idea be-

hind the solitudes of Fascist hospitality was the purpose of anæsthetizing the moral resistance of the foreigners, and of securing English-speaking or English-deaf-mute neutrality when the hour of Fascist war and glory struck. This legend, however, went beyond the capacity even of human gullibility. That Fascism had performed the miracle of draining the Pontine marshes and of setting the Neapolitan pickpocket to honest work was no reason to believe in the miracle of Italy's being changed into a warlike nation likely to induce gooseflesh in the mighties of the earth. Of militaristic blare there was plenty in Mussolini's speeches; but they were for domestic consumption and he had never endorsed them when talking sedately with a foreign visitor. The drill of militaristic discipline was a healthful exercise for a slack nation, as pointed out by Ludwig, while the booming utterances of the Duce must be regarded as concessions to that taste for oratorical magnificence which seems almost natural to the race. Finer himself had written, as late as March 1935: "If he has continued to roar who will say that he still springs?"—in which case, as in so many others, the humorous clairvoyance of the prophet was the just reward for the impartiality of the historian.

If the visitor was somehow above the average level of tourism, perchance he was acquainted with one or other foreign correspondent in Rome. Sitting outdoors with him by a pint of Frascati and a slice of provolone cheese he had the pleasure of hearing his optimism confirmed by an expert; and "why," it was suggested, "not try to approach Him personally? It is not so difficult as Italians say; at least not for us." In fact the eight hundred specialized policemen guarding the Duce's life night and day were no impediment to the foreign pilgrim. He had never shaken hands with the king of England or the president of the United States; he never had seen a dictator except perhaps the coloured hero of O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*; and yet to his own amazement he was admitted to the actual presence of this most powerful man on earth, of this most colourful personality in modern history. The Duce's profile was truly Roman, but his

smile winning and his manners of the best. He had gone so far as to stand up from his desk, encouraging with the example of a few courteous steps toward the advancing visitor the latter's many steps on the slippery marble floor of the Hall of Victories; then, sitting again and flashing intelligence from his brow and will-power from his chin, he had said vigorous but sensible things. His English was almost intelligible, his love for peace sincere, his familiarity with the New Deal and other headlines of American Government surprising. Ten minutes of contact with such a maker of history was, for a college president or a bank executive, the thrill of a lifetime.

Now, his vacation expiring, our tourist—if he belonged to the category of graduated informers of public opinion—could set himself to write, especially if his writer's hand had been strengthened by the Duce's handshake. Convincedly, mercilessly, brazenly, he could paint pictures of Italy like the one which follows and in which one of the many thousands of Italy's executioners is pictured such as he is contemplated by happy tourists in a train coach: "Across from them sat a Fascist in his black shirt and grey uniform, his Robin Hood bonnet at a rakish angle. Over one shoulder and under the other arm swung an ammunition belt, and his holster was bulging and businesslike. In his gloved hand he carried his *bastone*—not a delicate swaggerstick but a stout cudgel that looked as if it might be loaded. He was on some errand of righting Italy, making it safe and clean and busy, refreshed and strong."<sup>1</sup> The other tourists, those belonging to the mediocre crowd, were satisfied when alighting on their pier with extolling the gorgeous time they had had over there, and voicing their enthusiasm about Italy, as well as about the Duce's personal magnetism, overawing enough even when working at a distance from the balcony above the billowing populace. In the years of the depression he, the homecomer concerned with the plight of the Stock Exchange, or she, the home-

<sup>1</sup> Paul Wiltach, *An Italian Holiday*, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1928.

comer confronted with the hiring of a new cook, would occasionally vent the hope, however slight, that a man on horseback might rise some day against this country's clouded horizon. At any rate, when meeting an Italian exile next evening at a party they did not miss the opportunity of lecturing him—to be sure, with the most liberal respect for his discordant opinion—about Fascist Italy, how safe and clean and busy, how refreshed and strong she was.

## *The Foreign Legion*

SO FAR as there may be indulgence for carefree ignorance and easy-going egoism, such an indulgence must be granted to the propagandizing tourist. Of all the accomplices of tyranny, he is the most entitled to the benefit of extenuating circumstances. The statesmen and financiers, the writers on the editorial staffs, were worse. Guiltiest of all are the intellectual leaders and philosophers, the moral and poetical inspirers of contemporary society and announcers of the future—supposing that such attributes can be used without irony for more people in our century than can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

No benevolence of irony can veil this *trahison des clercs*, this treason of the intellectuals, topping any past example of wilful or unconscious desertion. Unconsciousness had its share; nay, good feeling too, as Hell is paved with good intentions. The savants and poets who pilgrimed from the four corners of the world to Fascism, the kings of virtue and truth who paid a free

tribute of incense and myrrh to tyranny, had a sentimental excuse in their fondness for Italy, the loveliest of countries, the cradle of all souls. Was not Fascism a growth of Italy? Was not Mussolini a son of Italy? Then why should they discriminate in their all-embracing cult of Italy?

There, in the choice party of misled leaders, is the German travelling philosopher Hermann Keyserling, who has just discovered that Fascism and Mussolini are after all the same stuff of which Italian greatness and Italian great men in the past were made; which statement, if accurate, should lead to the conclusion that Italy, if she wants to live, must change the stuff of which her past is made. The traveller did not draw the conclusion. It is not known whether, when Nazism rose, he made peace with himself and with it by the no less obvious discovery that Nazism and Hitler are after all the same stuff of which German greatness and folly in the past were made.

There, in the same party, although not so tall, is the official portrait-painter looking up at the conqueror's face and finding out that he really resembles Colleoni, an equestrian statue; thus prevented from looking down at what lies under the horse's hoofs.

There is also the Parisian academician, happy at having chanced on another field of phraseological diamonds about Rome and Gaul, grandeur and *beauté*, which he will facet into sumptuous sequences for his next address under the Coupole: not to speak of another and imperial decoration enhancing the prestige of his rather republican livery.

However small relatively, the foreign legion more than justifies the large army of the Italian intellectuals enlisted for compulsory service. At last they can smile; at last they feel assured that what they did was right. It now becomes apparent that their surrender was not to evil things since great men from abroad do for the fun of it what they did perforce.

Meanwhile other faces become recognizable in the foreign legion: most characteristic the Jews, novelists and moralists of



international renown, who have pressed their national brains under international silk hats and tried to forget about them. They are offspring of the race which had the largest share of responsibility in stirring the spirit of particularism, the narcissism of the people elect, and together with it the highest glory in merging this heresy into the universal humanity of its prophets and sufferers. Often their minds are wavering and anxious to compromise. Theoretical reasons are militant against Fascism, this much is clear; on the other hand, in the realm of facts, it is equally clear that no systematic persecution of the Jews, no purge or pogrom, has taken place in Italy. The reason for this, as explained by critics, is that the Italian Jews are a mere handful, not quite fifty thousand in over forty millions: very many of them capitalists, and dutiful conformists since the dawn of Fascism. Some paragraphs in Mussolini's private biography provide a supplementary clue to this semblance of leniency; regardless of which, advancement in academic or civil service is being made steadily harder to Semites. A rumbling of Antisemitism grows increasingly audible in the controlled press, and while racial dogmas are now frankly floated by juvenile sociologists of the regime, a couple of Jewish merchants who did not substitute the Sunday for their Sabbath were legally flogged in the market of Tripoli. These and other allegations of Antisemitism may be truthful; it seems, however, wise for Jewish writers, as well as for their friends in the world press, to hush them, fathering the regrettable episodes upon minor officials and scribes and leaving unsuspected the magnanimity of the Duce. As long as there is a chance of playing him against Hitler, and of using his power to preserve the independence of Austria, not even the slightest chance should be neglected. If the Jews are allowed a decent or at least a bearable life in Rome and Vienna, why bother about Italy? "We cannot refuse our gratitude to Mussolini," thus spake one of them.

This, the persistence of national egoism with its implication of defective charity toward the strangers and in the present case

toward the Italians, accounts greatly for the poor showing made in these years by the cosmopolitan élite: a club of international good talkers, each in his own idiom, among whom the Holy Spirit of real supernaturalism is still to descend. It is the Irishman in G. B. Shaw who toys with Fascism merely for the pleasure of teasing the hypocritical English tradition of liberty, thus gratifying the only consistent passion of his life, an Irish dislike, half jocular, half bitter, of Britain. Finer, the Britisher, passing by, does not care to inquire about the motive behind the playwright's mind; he stops a moment, shocked, asking: "What is Shaw doing among the homicides?" But if he looked around in the small crowd he would recognize a number of his countrymen, full-blooded Englishmen: moralists and sociologists like himself, authors of fine repute, and, to his and our amazement, H. G. Wells.

His presence among the converts to Italian Fascism—however qualified by the prudence of his words—is the most instructive of all. There is a lesson on the power of contagion and collective suggestion in the fact that the dark waters released from the Foreign Office and other such mills where truth is ground small could splash even the observatory of Wells, this most honourable and credible of contemporary prophets.

"The Fascist dictatorship of Mussolini in Italy"—thus he wrote in *The Shape of Things to Come*, 1933—"had something in it of a more enduring type than most of the other supersessions of parliamentary methods. It rose not as a personal usurpation but as the expression of an organization with a purpose and a sort of doctrine of its own. The intellectual content of Fascism was limited, nationalist, and romantic; its methods, especially in its opening, were violent and dreadful; but at least it insisted upon discipline and public service for its members. It appeared as a counter movement to a chaotic labour movement, but its support of the still-surviving monarchy and of the Church was qualified by a considerable boldness in handling education and private property for the public benefit. Fascism indeed was

not an altogether bad thing; it was a bad good thing; and Mussolini has left his mark on history.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, he has left his mark.

## *A "Doctrine of Its Own"*

NOW having conquered the monarchy and the Church and the benevolence of the spiritual and political potentates of the world, he could set to shape that thing of Fascism which H. G. Wells calls a "doctrine of its own." This happened, more definitely than in the collection of his contradictory editorials and speeches, in a long article under the heading *Fascismo* published in the fourteenth volume of the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, in 1932. Immediately thereafter it was republished in a pamphlet with the addition of a "History of Fascism" as visioned by the official historiographer Gioacchino Volpe.

A "Prelude to Machiavelli" had been already produced by Mussolini. The article in the encyclopædia might have been entitled "The New Prince, or the Duce." It is the Newest Testament of mankind, an authoritative document the knowledge of which is a prerequisite for all who are plodding through this era. It certainly is a secular Syllabus, following at seventy years' distance the ecclesiastical Syllabus of Pius IX and conceived in fairly the same spirit. An adequate summary of its content would

<sup>1</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1933.

be contained in as few words as *Declaration of the Dependence of Man or Of Human Bondage*.

It is to the credit of the document that many perversions of modern thought, from Machiavelli to Nietzsche, from Hobbes to Hegel and Pareto, are compressed therein into a compound remarkably quintessential and apodictic. Whether the product is all of Mussolini's making or whether neo-idealistic philosophy in the person of Giovanni Gentile lent a hand may be left to future scholars to decide. The dialectical shell is of the stuff that was transmitted from Germany to Croce and Gentile and from the latter to Fascism; but nothing in the inspiration and purpose is such as to impair the credibility of the signatory's authorship.

Holy is the State and the State alone. Religion, in the particular case "that particular positive religion that is Italian Catholicism," is a valuable asset of the State and must be protected and fostered as such. The State, in its turn, is not at all the embodiment of a natural necessity, nor does it coincide with the natural facts of race and nation; in which case its expanding power would be limited within the narrowness of objective bounds. The State is a creation of the Spirit, or of the Will of History. But where and how does this Spirit or Will visibly appear? Not in the God of the believer, since God, the God of *Italian* Catholicism, is merely an asset of the State, which definitely "has no theology." Nor does it appear in the Nature of the anthropologist or geographer. Nor, finally, in the demos of the democrat or in the mass of Marx. The Spirit or Will, otherwise called State, embodies itself "in the few, nay, in the One." In other words it is the despot, and the despot alone, who is the Holy.

The writer of this book, while refusing the Fascist oath which he as a university professor was supposed to take and which would have made of him a convert to the above doctrine, addressed Mussolini with a circumstantiated letter in which he tried to call the addressee's attention to the inescapable issues of

his doctrine. If the One of Fascism is not the anointed of the Lord nor the chosen of the people, if neither Dante nor Mazzini, if neither legitimacy nor revolution, accounts for him, who then is he? If the social system on which his omnipotence reposes is neither the Church nor the plebiscite nor the lineage of dynastic or aristocratic blood which Fascism ignores, what is that system unless it be the daggers of a Prætorian Guard, which are no system at all? In the last analysis the One of Fascism is nobody else but the One or Unique of Stirner's anarchism, with a State which is his property. True, the State is holy, as unbridled individualism is unholy; and nowhere else is man human but in his service to the community of men; but that State alone would be holy which should embrace all mankind in its ideal purpose: the state of Dante or Mazzini. The Fascist state, this Moloch, soldering its subject masses into the unanimity of forced labour and forced consent only to overthrow beyond its borders international law and order by means of a ruthless strife, the only alternative of which is racial or individual tyranny, such a state cannot possibly claim any sacrosanctity. Far from being the converse of rugged individualism, it is its final expression, in its most devastating form.

Such, in slightly different sentences, was the substance of this writer's letter. It did not make of the Duce a convert.

Another high light in Mussolini's Fascist Manifesto was the theory of war and peace. It was strictly correlated with the foregoing conclusions about individual and state, and culminated in the feeling that peace is nothing but a relaxation or interlude, war being, and happily so, the permanent destination of man. "First of all, Fascism, as regards the future in general and the development of mankind, and apart from any consideration of current politics, does not believe either in the possibility or in the benefit of perpetual peace. It therefore rejects pacifism which hides a renunciation of fight, a cowardice before sacrifice. War alone carries to the maximum of tension all human energies and stamps with a seal of nobility the peoples which have the virtue

of facing it. All other tests are substitutes which never put man in front of himself, in the alternative of life and death. Hence, any doctrine issuing from the preconceived postulate of peace is extraneous to Fascism; and likewise extraneous to the spirit of Fascism are all internationalistic and societary structures [whereby the League of Nations was signally meant], even though accepted on account of whatever use they may have in particular political situations. Such structures, as history gives evidence, can be scattered to the winds when sentimental, ideal, and practical elements arouse to storm the hearts of the peoples."

It is a well-known ability of viciousness to mimic the appearances of virtue and truth; else, should evil look as ugly as it is, its power upon humans would be small. This favourite guile of the fiend has been long since adumbrated in the allegory introducing Satan as a handsome angel, nay, the handsomest in all the celestial array. Accordingly, the first section of Mussolini's dissertation smuggled the anarchy and tyranny of the one as a remedy against the disintegrating individualism of the many; while the latter section disguises lust for carnage and sadistic glory as heroism, nay, as the only possible redemption from cowardice and selfishness.

It should have come out clearly for the readers and for the author as well that it is not the amount which decides the quality of human energy. Such phrases as "the maximum of tension" or "the storm in the people's hearts" are liquor spilt from a cheap romantic cask. It used to be intoxicating; it now is lees and sourness. Were the amount or violence of explosive energy the measure for human conduct, the fury of the arsonist should seem better than the architect's endurance and the rapist should be above the saint. Granting that the presence, assumed or actual, of a collective devotion in the background of military virtues establishes a difference between warring bravery and criminal amok, it remains none the less clear that the same reasons which seem to justify mass slaughter in battles are apt to glorify not

only mass terror in revolutions but ritual cannibalism and human sacrifices. In the same way the dialectics working in behalf of passive discipline and the totalitarian state would prove equally convincing if applied to slave labour and mass prostitution as practised in Oriental monarchies of old. It may be true that no life is really human which has never confronted the test of peril and courage; but, apart from the statement of the poet saying, "I was a man, therefore a fighter too," and from the opportunities for innocuous heroism awaiting us unaware around the corner, an ideal Republic might well decree that no boy or girl should obtain the insignia of adult age without having visited a cage of wild beasts or piloted an airplane under ceiling zero. No imperative reason deprives of alternatives the doctrine contending that the game of killing fellow-men is the exclusive test of human gallantry: even supposing that there is real gallantry in the wretched lad who, enlisted under compulsory conscription, leaps upon the foe, with the real purpose of fleeing forward to grasp in the enemy trench the spare chances of life which he would miss altogether if he turned his back to the "enemy," thereupon to face a firing squad of his own brothers.

As for the lesson of history, displaying evidence that war must break out whenever the elements of passion arouse to storm the hearts of the peoples, or in other words that war is eternal and holy, history has no lesson to give. History does not even know with satisfactory accuracy whether or not Cain really was our common progenitor, whether warfare is an instinct inborn to the nature of man or the perversion of a devious stock. The only lesson of history is that even if nature made us wicked and foolish, it is the calling of man and his obstinate purpose through the ages to master nature, not to fawn on it, to fight against death, not to reap its harvest. Kant, midway between a sober realism and an unyielding hope, wrote that "Utopias are sweet dreams, but to strive relentlessly toward them is the duty of the citizen and of the statesman as well."

It is a fairly common feature in the leftist literature of our

century, from Barbusse's novels to *All Quiet on the Western Front* and further, that the empirical and even epicurean rights of the individual, however respectable in themselves, his loathing of suffering, his yearning for life and joy, are stressed so as to outweigh by far whatever objective and truly heroic meanings underlie the idea of peace. This feature made easier for Mussolini and his peers the opposite propaganda conveying barbarism and cruelty under the mantle of Nietzschean and d'Annunzian heroism. Nevertheless, it is unexpectedly encouraging for the dreamer to contemplate how, ultimately, even the wilful waters of war propaganda flow to the mill of Utopian dreams: which some day must come true. War, even in the most desperate moments of human history, was hardly ever possible except under the urge of actual need or hunger or under the banner of some belief or delusion such as religious fanaticism or caste honour or the defence of the hearth. Might, in other words, always was the expression of necessity or of an alleged right, which in its turn was made to coincide with a natural or ethical duty. Now, if the hearth or state becomes, as it does in the Fascist doctrine, the creation and property of the One, if religion is a stratagem of state and warfare, if even economic determinism is deprived of its command, War is waged for War's sake alone, and all will to might is bound to exhaust itself in a whirl of artificial hatred and empty ambition. There may be better sports if war is sheer sport; and Death in the game of collective killing, when stripped of its vestments, remains just as attractive as the well-known skeleton with its dripping sickle. It is likely that some day the Fascist Manifesto will be remembered as more effective for the propaganda of peace than the books of Barbusse or Remarque, of Hemingway or Huxley, all together.

But such objections, as voiced outside or rumbling in the deafened conscience of the prophet, did not halt the flight of his self-postulating eloquence. Its record height was reached in the sentence averring that it is the State which "lifts man from the



elementary life of the tribe to the uppermost expression of human power which is the empire." Of course, it is not true. Empire—when planned by theoretical will and not born of the obscure leaven of necessity as all real empires were—is barrenness: a work of art without the permanence and purity of art; or, to speak in Faustian terms, such an empire is the *Imperiumculum* of the *Homunculus*. Of course, the uppermost expression of human power is not such or any other kind of empire. It is perfection in mutual love. This goal cannot be neared or even visioned by any single state, however vast. Its place is in the world-state, or Catholicity of the believers in the final victory of Man.

Nevertheless, whatever unity was possible in the personality of Mussolini, now was achieved. He had rhythmized his individualism to the Prussian goose-step, and grafted the Roman complex into the rind of his anarchism. As Cola di Rienzo had bathed in the bathtub of Constantine the Great, thereby restoring in himself the double unity, theological and secular, of Constantine's Empire, so had Mussolini metaphorically cleansed his original sin in those very waters, making of the rioter of Romagna and of the medieval visionary one and the same person. "This region [Italy] seems created for the purpose of resurrecting dead things." Thus wrote Machiavelli; although that famous wit did not charge such words with the slightest intention of sarcasm or melancholy.

Now the task was to draw down the live eagle of empire from that panoply of dead philosophemes, and to make words into swords. Those, Italians and foreigners, who explained all that phraseology of war and conquest simply as a smoke screen to cover the plan of carrying on, were reducing Mussolini to their own proportions; since seldom is a great man great for his valets. However disputable his size, it far exceeded the measure of one who should feel satisfied with wielding a power more or less comparable to that of a Giolitti or Baldwin, despite the colossal expenditure in terror and fear. It is not permanence in a

mediocre dictatorship that he was after, but fulfilment in an epic of the regular sort; and all the pages that had been written into his book of destiny from 1922 to 1931 were just preface to him.

A confession of this obsession can be read in the last but one of the *Talks* with Ludwig, which took place in the early spring of 1932 and were published in the following June. Unexpectedly Mussolini stated: "Today I am a prisoner, more than I was in jail."

"How can you say this!" exclaimed the historian. "Nobody in the world has less right than you to say this! . . ."

"As he noticed my emotion he sharpened his attention and asked: 'Why?'"

"'Because nobody on earth exercises power with greater liberty than you do,' I exclaimed again."

Now certainly Mussolini realized how hopeless it was to sharpen the attention of the historian. He beckoned to him that he might calm himself; "then said . . ." What he said next is not remarkable; the dialogue subsided in the still waters of commonplaces and ordinary half-truths; and the meaning of that flash of self-confession was lost irreparably.

It should have been plain. Self-seeking liberty, like any other self-centred greed, is a mirage. The attainment of its ultimate goal is unchangeably remote on the horizon.

Italy, from the ridge of the mountains to the bottom of the territorial seas, was his. It was officially styled "Mussolini's Italy." His were the Italians, from the Pope to the chimney-sweeper, "the Italians of Mussolini." But beyond those walls and waves there still stood forces uncontrolled by him, limiting him; and International Law with the League of Nations was a law which the One had not yet broken. His Italy was his jail.

It had been asked long since: "Thee, boundless Nature, how make thee my own?" It was now as if he asked: "How shall I grasp thee, ever deceitful History?" Little man, what now?

The endeavour to shatter the society of man and to emerge in the plenitude of his liberty, the fulfilment of the prophecy

of d'Annunzio who had visioned the Superman as Breaker of All Laws and Roman Emperor at once, is the theme of Mussolini's third lustrum of reign.

It would make an absorbing chapter of history, if we and the millions were not the passive stuff of his experiment.

VI

## March on the World



## "Seeking Whom He May Devour"

HE HAD not rested after the unfortunate affair of Corfu. Plans of war and conquest were carefully schemed and weighed in the following years, in all directions of the compass.

Since no necessity or passion except an inane ambition provoked those warlike cravings, they needed not to have a determined aim. Their essence had been compressed once for all in the line of d'Annunzio: "Arm the prow and sail toward the world"; and the world was, obviously, anywhere.

The nationalist élite, whose ideology Fascism had incorporated into itself, hated nothing, loved nothing, coveted all. A young lieutenant, on an official mission in Paris during the World War, while strolling at night and looking up at the Vendôme Column in the alarm-ridden obscurity of the air-raid hour, would stop and murmur to his astonished comrade: "How grand and awe-inspiring the Place Vendôme is! How wonderful it will be when *all this shall be ours!*" The admiral in the harbour of Salonika during the inter-Allied occupation in 1917, while sitting convivially with his staff and a guest, would explain to the latter what a situation the Macedonian one was, and why and how the Allied Powers, not wishing Greece or Bulgaria or Serbia installed in Salonika, must hand it over at the end of the war to the king of Italy. He damped his voice a trifle when adding that he had disclosed this view to the British admiral in the harbour, who had found it flawless. In later years, with Fascism already in the saddle, a Roman daily of the Fascist van-

guard printed some news about xenophobia and unrest in China with the editor's comment that the day would come when China, having finally ascertained both her own incapacity and the corruption of the other nations, should call Fascism and Italy to rule her.

Accordingly, the poles and the sky alone were limits to the One's will to power. Nobile, the explorer who enlivened with the briskness of tribal competition the indifference of the eternal ice, tried hard—at the risk of wrecking the expedition—to drop a conquering Fascist flag from his airship exactly on the North Pole, exactly on the day when gunfire and cheers were celebrating in Italy an anniversary of the Italian intervention in the World War. The wings of de Pinedo and other flyers who spanned the oceans were declared symbolical of the Eagle's wings that were to flap. Meanwhile an elaborate design was drawn, with most scrupulous precision of detail, to disrupt existing conditions in Eastern Europe, mixing up passions, armies, and boundaries from the Carpathian mountains to the Ægean sea. It was entrusted wholly or piecemeal to diplomats, military agents, and *agents provocateurs*. Victories as quick as lightning and marches as overpowering as those of Alexander were pinned on military maps more splendid than the firmament; there, although there alone, the legions under the lictorial sign were flung from Provence to Bavaria, from Dalmatia to Vienna, from Tunisia to Asia Minor. Briand and Stresemann, the exiled Habsburgs and the princelings of Arabia, heard the roar alike. No one, not the pilot himself, while sailing toward the world, knew which the first port of call should be, nor was there the slightest implication of humour in the Bacchic apostrophe with which the Podestà of Milan—later secretly dismissed and confined under the secret charge of embezzlement—addressed the distant Duce in a public speech: "Duce, tell us against whom we shall march! We will!" Under the finger of the One the wheel of desire kept turning. The regimented crowds, utterly devoid of love and hatred, tramped to his palace, there to learn whom they

must hate; and the vacuousness of their passion, like a sail manoeuvred by the boatman, took the wind from above. He stepped to the balcony, fulgurant amid his satraps. He would whip up the animal scum bubbling below, to hatred for, say, France; but while inhaling their delirious howls he would pull the sleeve of the Minister of the Interior at his side and drop a word in his ear that he might mobilize as many troops as necessary to protect the French Embassy from the spontaneous demonstration that was to ensue.

The exit from Corfu had been a warning, and no real Prince need be blamed if, while wanting wars, he wants them successful. Not yet were the conjunctures propitious; and wherever he tried to snap, France or England or both with their thick-woven system of international clienteles were guardant, in behalf of themselves and of their protégés, signally of Yugoslavia, which seemed to be the bone nearest to the Fascist teeth. Of all imaginary leaps the most insistently fancied and consistently pre-arranged was the invasion of Asia Minor. Mustafa Kemal crammed with explosives the haven of Smyrna, where ships could now come and go their narrow way only under guidance of Turkish pilots thereto commissioned; he also kept a close eye on other entrances to his territory. Nevertheless, the hour of combat was imminent when one day, somehow, the ghosts of Britain's battleships unexpectedly greyed the horizon. The jaunt was adjourned. Not that the parades, the bellicose pageants, the reviews of the navy, the inflammatory harangues, the dress rehearsals of future triumphs, were adjourned too. On the contrary, with every new frustration the drill grew more frantic, and war games were held which—except for the absence of the enemy—looked and sounded like real wars. A province on the French border, which theretofore had carried on with the name of Porto Maurizio and with the glory of its carnations and olives, awoke one morning as Imperia, and *Via dell' Impero* was the sign on the melodramatic Roman artery between the Duce's palace and the Coliseum. The inhibited potential of war



was spent—in addition to bullfights, soccer, international marathons, and nationalist slaps in the faces of Antifascist satirists—in the small change of everyday symbolism. Thus a campaign for an increased production of cereals became the Battle of Wheat or Battle of Rice; the propaganda to enhance the consumption of grapes, which might prove another element of economic self-sufficiency for the purpose of war, was the Battle of Grapes; and the Battle of Mice was the extermination of many such rodents in cellars and attics on the day and at the hour set by the Government for that belligerency. Many, however, knew the insipidness of such substitutes, and worry became visible. No one, certainly, was allowed to ask the Duce what he had meant the year before when, addressing the masses on the anniversary of the March on Rome, he had promised a meeting next year somewhere else, and without naming the place had clearly intimated that it was beyond the borders. The promise had silently faded, and silence was observed by all. But Augusto Turati, the Secretary General of the Fascist party—later secretly dismissed and confined under the secret charge of disorderly conduct—somehow expressed the common worry when sighing in public: “I wish the days of expectation were over; I wish the hour of action had struck!” His successor, a man named Giuriati, was so positively aware of scepticism creeping into rank and file that he must try to revive their spirits by maintaining that in spite of all delays, “as long as the Duce rides on horseback at the head of his legions, Empire is the goal.” The Duce himself, presented with a biography composed by a lady, making of him a Plutarchian hero, waived modestly the surplus of glorification and explained: “I have won no war.”

To the watchfulness of France and England—who liked Fascism in Italy but wanted also peace in Europe, or wanted to eat the cake and have it too—and to the machinery of the League of Nations, another mighty buttress of peace had been added with the Treaty of Locarno. It was signed in the autumn of 1925, shortly after the establishment of tyranny in Italy. Since

France and Germany, the protagonists of the thousand-year-old European feud, acknowledged each other's boundaries, while Britain and Italy pledged themselves to support with all their means the *status quo*, the agreement seemed to stabilize the situation in Europe, slackening irremediably the rope on which nationalism used to dance. It was the triumph of Briand, who spoke of the “Spirit of Locarno” with a kind of mystical fervour. The delegates of Mussolini, headed by a subtle jurist who despised Fascism and served it, had seen or had been made to see during the negotiations that their success would stultify the very meaning of Fascism, which reposed on the assumption that war is immanent, eternal, and divine. They did their best to wreck the pact but could not; and at the eleventh hour Mussolini, unable to afford isolation, rushed from Rome to sign the document. It was to be his last trip abroad; the attitude of the small crowds and of the newspaper men was none too encouraging; and he decided to postpone any sally out of his well-protected abode until the day, as he confidently said to a youthful Fascist scribe, when he might ride on horseback under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

There, in Locarno, he spoke up to one of his delegates. “You don't realize,” said he in a fit of anger, “what all this means. This treaty prevents me from having war for ten years.” This numeral struck, from that moment on, deep roots in his imagination, and quite often in the following years—especially when gleefully stating that the “Spirit of Locarno” was evaporating—he repeated publicly the prediction that the great world crisis would break out between 1935 and 1940. This prediction became commonplace in the world at large; and when 1935 dawned, when the five-year wrecking plan was started, it was redundant to add to Mussolini's glories the glory also of prophecy, since it is fairly easy for a prophet to prophesy his own purpose and will. The reasons why he chose those dates for the final fulfilment are partly clear. It is clear that the years between 1935 and 1940 were visioned as those during which France,

drafting to military service the children born from 1915 on in the years of war and low birth-rate, would presumably be at her weakest. Other inspirations remain enveloped in the mystery of Mussolini's personal superstitions, chiromancy, cartomancy, and others. An hereditary disposition of his family, in which seldom if ever the age of fifty is much surpassed, was constantly a writing on the wall for him, however valiantly he strove to defeat that menace by means of a severe diet and planned exercise, checking also with a perseverance resembling virtue the recurrences of past diseases. On the whole it seemed not unreasonable to set the deadline around the age of fifty-five, unless a convenient opportunity sprang earlier from the lap of the gods: devoting the intermediate decade to the increase of armaments, the drill of a warlike generation, and the overthrow of Locarno, Geneva, and other such impediments. The fox having completed its work, the lion might leap. Records of these soliloquies are certainly not catalogued in public libraries, and positive evidence, either in autobiography or eavesdropping, will hardly be available to this generation. But circumstantial evidence is imposing in Mussolini's sayings, writings, and doings from 1925 onward; and strikingly enough the date for a World's Fair in Rome, coincident with the bimillenary of Cæsar's consulate, was set for 1941, as if to close the fatal quinquennium with a world celebration of the new Roman Empire and of his coronation, *coram universo*, as the new Charlemagne.

A world-conqueror and world-destroyer of the past had had a strangely similar career—at least so far as the Duce's career can be summed up before its close, at this writing. This was Attila, the king of the Huns. Depicted by legend merely as a man-eating beast, a scourge of God, he is well known to history as having had even more of the fox than of the lion in himself. Delayed by an almost punctilious care in arranging the diplomatic conditions that might seem most profitable to the final adventure of world-empire, he waited until the very threshold of old age before plunging into destruction, which happened to

be self-destruction as well. To be sure, Mussolini, a singer of Youth, *Giovinezza*, in unison with his crowds, loathed old age; an earlier opportunity would have been welcome. But the lesson of Corfu, and such others as more covertly had followed it, cowed impatience; nor did he ever dream that the Fascist army and navy and finances and supplies, however raised to the utmost of their potentialities, might challenge the Western Powers, unless these consented first to disintegrate within themselves. More sensibly than his teacher Machiavelli—who in his tragicomic idolatry of antiquity had minimized the use of artillery in modern war, since in the Roman wars there had been none—he was receptive to the suggestions of futuristic warfare, therefore urging Italy with words and deeds to "fly as many airplanes as to obscure the sun." But this took time, and even when achieved it could provide Fascism with the chances rather of striking a surprise blow at the start of the operations or of carrying out terrific raids against the populations of Paris and London than of seeing it through with France and England in the long run. The wisest counsel for several years was to try whether war might be started somewhere else, among other contenders; then to mix whole-heartedly in the inspiring confusion. This was done, or tried, conscientiously. Arms were smuggled, impudently, to Hungary and wherever else it seemed promising; conspiracies were forged, officials bribed, press organs purchased wherever an opportunity for scandal or riot or upheaval came handy; all slumbering hatreds, be they of races or classes or groups, were everywhere stimulated and revived to more than pristine strength. The arsonist could almost be seen in the European night, roaming with his fuse in search of powder-kegs, that from the conflagration he might take, if not the live eagle, the roast suckling pig of Empire. But nothing would do, and all powders were wet.

The historian Salvemini in 1932 published a book entitled *Mussolini as a Diplomat*. With scholarly exactitude made spicy by a kind of hilarious bitterness he mustered the Duce's failures

in the international field: an impressive roll. As far as each and any of the particular endeavours of Mussolini were commensurable with the objective results particularly obtained, Salvemini's appraisal was unobjectionable, and never before had a Machiavellian statesman behaved more naïvely. On the other hand, the historian was heavily influenced, as were many other Antifascists, by foregone conclusions about the size of Mussolini's personality. These conclusions also were accurate in a way; but the quality, however disheartening, of Mussolini's character and mind did not prevent him from harbouring a stupendous, however atrocious, dream: a disproportion observable not infrequently in life, and not only behind asylum gates. Montaigne had said that a strong imagination produces the event; and an effect of this rule rewarded the unbending faith in evil with which Mussolini had survived the monotonous sequence of his failures in the ten years since Corfu. True, he had not scored one point; even Albania, the small pitiful country across the Adriatic now practically under his sway as a vassal state, was naught to him so long as he was not allowed to use its coast as a bridgehead for the conquest of Yugoslavia or at least to paint its boundaries in Fascist colour. He had no bird in hand; but the dove of peace had been scared out of the European sky; and this result made up for all default.

Again, after the days of Versailles, the balance between the forces of horror and those of reason, between havoc and law, had grown so sensitive that a much smaller factor than Italy would have weighed decisively. The dagger of Fascism—nay, the very words and breath of Fascism—tipped the scales. From the armistice of 1918 to Locarno and even later, Europe had felt as if she were proceeding, or trudging, on a perilous yet passable road to peace; no menace clouded the West, the internationally aggressive wave of Bolshevism had abated under Stalin's command, and good will was peering through the ruins on either bank of the Rhine. Now, at some undefinable moment in the late twenties, with Nazism not yet in the saddle nor sure

to be, it occurred to Europe, or thus she felt, that the road to peace was a blind alley. Not the verifiable amount of explosives which Fascist diplomacy—slighted as yet by most in its efficiency—was heaping and drying, not the impact of actual circumstances, was the capital factor in this overturn, but mental suggestion in the maze of suspicion and ambush. The Spirit of Locarno evaporating, another essence took its place, and the psychology of recovery was superseded by the psychology of relapse. In most minds on both sides of the Atlantic the speculation about the next World War was thenceforth no longer the whether, but merely the when and how.

## *Repercussions of an American Earthquake*

THIS inward trend toward war, which was bound to prove, as usual, more operative than outward necessity, had been conjured for the greatest part by the insistence of Fascism, playing the role of Iago in the European drama. Other events meanwhile matured beyond the range of Fascism; often unexpected by it and yet auxiliary to its will. The most remarkable of all was the crash in Wall Street at the end of 1929. Certainly the rising nationalisms with their trade barriers and demented finances made one alone among the many causes of that convulsion, a plainer explanation of which lies in wholesale human greed and fear, or perhaps in the effects of the sun spots, as suggested by a new kind of astrology supplementing

the defective lights of contemporary economics. On this planet, however, since evil thrives on evil and all causes of ruin usually work together, the Wall Street disaster could not fail to bring an unforeseen contribution to the Fascist effort. This contribution was at least twofold. For one thing, the fact that depression in Italy had begun three years earlier as a direct consequence of the Government's monetary, military, and commercial policies, could now be quietly shelved. The Italian people was ordered to become amnesia-stricken about it, and to construe its own destitution as an aftermath of the American catastrophe and a penalty, hitting guilty and guiltless alike, for the folly of individualistic economy and materialistic democracy. Nay, it was brought home to the Italian people that in the common misery they still were better off than those unhappy liberalistic countries; and a new refrain was tuned to match the old one of "trains running on time." This carved into the Italian minds, and not into them alone, the knowledge that Italy at least "had no breadlines": those parades of dejection in which millions of Americans crawled to dishonouring alms. Had not national egoism, sacred egoism, strictly enjoined one to mind one's own business, committees on American relief might almost have been thought of in Fascist Italy; so heartfelt was compassion for the poor American people.

On the other hand the vibrations of the Manhattan earthquake shook all shores, near and far, bringing forth beside the factual economic consequences the evidence that not even the legendary rock of American Fortune stood steady in a chaotic world. In its surest abode, in the best-equipped laboratory of its century-long experimentation, the democratic idea had gone bankrupt, and proved unable to confront problems rising from the multitudes in a war- and machine-age. This at least was the conclusion of galloping imaginations. Now, penury or panic or both gripped large sections of several classes in many countries, and while the proletariats with their usual sluggishness, and a number of professional lecturers with their usual futility, went

on toying with some kind or other of red panacea, many in the upper and lower strata of the bourgeoisie opened their windows to the wind from black Italy. Unquestionably there was something in what Mussolini and his loudspeakers were heralding. Unemployment in Italy was either non-existent or invisible (as was beggardom), and the safes seemed safe. Should confiscation and death prove inescapable at length also under the state capitalism of Fascism, it is none the less in human nature to prefer slow death to sudden end, and it is peace and order, such as the Italians had, which make life bearable, or when despair becomes too cruel, suffuse with a charm the symmetry of the cemetery. Thus from the initial break of the New York market, as though a dike had yielded, latitudes so far withheld invited the expansion of Fascism, and the Fascist idea, if not the Fascist armies, ran the world.

Under the constellation of these feelings, and on the eve of their maturing into full-sized events, the Fascist Manifesto of Mussolini, printed in 1932 but composed earlier, contained at least two truths. One was in Part I, paragraph 5. "Fascism is a religious conception. . . . Fascism, besides being a system of government, is also, and before all, a system of thought." This meant, in more sober words, that Fascism in its homeland Italy had been a mere fact of the mind, a gratuitous perversion undetermined by any objective necessity of history, and that economic or other interests had vegetated at random on that disorder, parasitical outgrowths rather than original causes of the ruin. The final sentence of the second part contributed a second credible statement: "Fascism now has in the world the universality of all the doctrines which, passing into reality, represent a moment in the history of the human spirit." This was true too; but the Italian picture, enlarged to universal proportions, looked different. In Italy the purpose of primacy and violence, and the revolt of an inferiority complex stimulated by the Roman myth, had been the substance of the phenomenon, with economic interests as its borrowed mask. On the vaster world-



scene, Fascism—a hybrid of Italian Fascism and world-depression—appeared most often as an economic will, with feathers of nationalism, racialism, heroism, on its self-conscious nudity. Here the Marxian interpretation of history, although not to the exclusion of all others, became workable again. To be sure, no Marxian prophet had ever visioned anything like Fascism; but when world-Fascism arose, the alinement of the classes fitted distinctly into the schemes of historical materialism as it did into those of a more familiar and permanent psychology. Plutocracy, a class ruled by greed and fear, with the surviving remnants of aristocracy, a class now ruled by fear alone, took the lead; the petty bourgeoisie, a class ruled by need and fear, provided its hosts of white-collar unemployed or employees on the verge of unemployment, unable to hope for security except from a Leviathan engulfing and feeding all citizens in state bureaucracy and state conscription. Middle bourgeoisie and intellectual élite were apparently doomed to subservience and nothingness, caught as they seemed to be between the pincers of upper and lower bourgeoisie. Primal obscurity under trampling armies was the destiny reserved to the proletariats. However sketchily, such a symmetry in the ordinance of the social classes had been noticeable in the secondary economic phenomena of Italian Fascism. Research directed by the American sociologist, Harold Lasswell, uncovered in the high governmental places under the Duce, himself a small bourgeois, a striking percentage of recruits from the lesser bourgeoisie and from plutocracy with its parasitical swarm of disbanded aristocrats. It uncovered also, among the many skills preparatory to the art of government, the prominence of skill in “propaganda” (this being a synonym for low-class literature and journalism), and of other skills such as skill in “ceremony” or in “fixing,” which are well known in varied forms to criminology.

Millions, in the pity and terror of the depression era, pawned their coats of decency and went forth in shirt sleeves. Grey, brown, blue, green, khaki, golden, silver shirts had their places

in the sun: a surprising prismatic refraction of the Italian black into which the original revolutionary red shirt of Garibaldi, unpremonished of such descendants, had been dyed. Everywhere, especially on Sunday noons, Nazis, Francists, Phalanxists, Rexists, or howsoever their modest inventiveness responded to the vowels and consonants of the Italian word Fascism, poured into the streets, manifesting in the trot of their feet their ideal of bread and totem. Thus France, under the inspiration of Maurras and Daudet and other such hoary Tartarins, who had been honoured as prophets in Italy but not in their own country, lived up to their balmy day, February 6, 1934, when apropos of the Stavisky affair all that had been done in one hundred fifty years since the Revolution seemed about to crumble and the Bastille to rise again. Thus England had her Mosleys, and America her Black Legions, totalitarian demagogues, dictators in her Southern states, and even a march—however parodical—on Washington, D.C. Russia herself, if Stalin is correct, mixed Trotskyian rancour with sub-Fascist treason, while, as all others contend, conspicuous ingredients of near-Fascist autocratic nationalism were blended with whatever was left of Marxian Socialism in the Russian state.

Minor countries, from the Baltic to the southern seas, unprotected by a consistent tradition in modern civilization and self-government or by the ramparts of conservative wealth, would yield occasionally to the infection. But stronger organisms, however shaken, resisted. For three full years after the depression had begun, the die-hard optimist still felt entitled to suppose that the world diffusion of Fascism was still a mode or a fad, with outcries, rituals, badges, and shirts—and, granted, with fisticuffs and stray bullets also—rather than an actual conquest. The real disease, confined until the spring of 1929 within the picturesque Italian lazaretto, had not yet exceeded its original area save in attenuated or sporadic form. True, between 1929 and 1931 Roman Fascism had conquered the Roman Church, multiplying the black shirts by the black frocks and enlisting the

latter in the service of the former (or conversely, according to the divergences and convergences of the desires of the Pope and the Duce). But the Church was Roman too, a sect among sects although the largest of all, and operative only where and when the spell of the old Roman Empire still persisted under a species of religious discipline. Not yet had the Catholicism of Fascism expanded into a catholicity; and for the unbending optimist it looked as though the black tide, despite its rise upon the commotion of world-economy, was more likely to splash the world than to cover any of its leading countries. As early as 1930 Mussolini had proclaimed: "Either we or they! Either their ideas or ours! Either our state or theirs!" It sounded overambitious. The ensuing statement of 1932 about the universality of Fascism, notwithstanding what had materialized meanwhile in the Far East, still seemed more credible in the realm of ideas than on the ground of tangible results.

## *Germany Joins Fascism*

JAPAN, in 1931, had been the first to come round. But the reactionary coup d'état there—if this is the right word for the event—adapted whatever suggestions might be drawn from the Italian example to the pattern of old-fashioned Japanese militarism; nor did tyranny in Tokyo then or in the following years ever grow so sweeping as to wipe out thoroughly Parliamentary opposition and freedom of the press. The seizure of Manchukuo and the expansion in China were theoretically encouraging for the theory of Fascism; and so was

the withdrawal of Japan from the League of Nations. But legalism, if not lawfulness, was respected to a certain degree in the latter of these developments, and the confusion in the Far East, however promising, seemed too distant and too well embanked within the passive resistance of Russia and of the Western Powers to overrun Europe. In one way or other Mussolini tried repeatedly to use Japan as an opportunity for his coveted world war; a good disciple of Wilhelm II—and not only in his fondness for army uniforms and marine caps or in his outbursts of Sinaitic eloquence—he waved the “yellow peril,” stepping out as a candidate for the leadership of white civilization against the East. But the *ballons d'essai* promptly flattened, and nobody heeded him except perhaps Japan herself in some moments of transient nervousness, which was easily superseded by a comprehensible feeling of mutual consideration between the trouble-makers, black and yellow. At any rate the Asian chaos was so far of no avail, and nothing had really happened until Nazism conquered Germany, in January 1933. This was a great event.

If one compares Nazism in its first four or five years of power with the history of Italian Fascism in the corresponding span of time—namely, what Nazism did between 1933 and 1937 with what Fascism did between 1922 and 1927—a series of differences becomes apparent along with one of identities. Most popularly known in the former series is the variance between the systematic persecution of the Jews in Germany and the many-sided but on the whole incomparably milder behaviour of Fascism toward the Jewish minority in Italy. That this difference, however, was merely casual, and due to external factors—among them the insignificant percentage of the Jewish element in Italy, about one per thousand—has been sufficiently pointed out. Hitler in his personal Bible, *Mein Kampf*, had included a penetrating remark about the implicit Antisemitism of Mussolini's policy, and had praised him on that account. Whenever Italian Fascism was confronted with a positive racial issue, its racialism was at least as ruthless as Hitler's; the extermination of the

Arabs in Libya under the governorship of General Graziani makes a more impressive page of history than many pogroms or concentration camps; and as soon as Ethiopia was conquered, terrifying legislation stifled as a criminal offence any intercourse of white conquerors with native women.

The real differences lie elsewhere. First of all, Hitler, quite similar to Mussolini in his social background of petty bourgeoisie and in several other respects, differed from him in the obtuse consistency of his mind. Several years younger than his Latin model, he had been able to escape the trial and error of nineteenth-century mentality; and, entirely moulded by military environment and World War, he had been for practically all his life a firm believer in nationalism and imperialism: shores of certitude on which he could land straightway, avoiding the devious course of Mussolini through socialism and anarchism. This is tantamount to stating that the Italian dictator is an adventurer in the armour of a borrowed ideology, while the German is a fanatic: with all the inferences about their predictable behaviour which are contained in this divergence of attitudes.

The second difference regards the intensity of tyranny in the two countries. Self-sacrifice on the part of conspirators and voluntary exiles was less noticeable in Germany than in Italy; but the passive resistance of public opinion proved more effective in a nation many of whose strata had absorbed intellectual freedom from Protestantism and heretic mysticism or from such teachers as Kant and Goethe. In the fifth year of Nazism it was still possible for a German newspaper to choose, if not its opinions, at least the types and wordings of its headlines; it was also possible for an audience in Berlin to applaud frantically a liberal orchestra conductor while ignoring the presence of the ruling trinity, Hitler Göring Goebbels, in the majesty of their box, or for Catholic and Protestant leaders to challenge the religious policy of the regime, even going so far as to allegorize the present struggle as a fight "between Satan and Christ." Transgressions of this and of any other kind had already, in the third year after

the March on Rome, become simply inconceivable in Italy. The absence of a king-emperor and of a pope made the power of Hitler seemingly more absolute than that of his Roman forerunner. But it was mere appearance; or at most, in the official roll of the *Almanach de Gotha* it was the formal precedence of Hitler, a chief of State, over Mussolini, nominally but a chief of Government. In the reality of things the king and the Pope in Rome had not a single word to say about or against what Mussolini was saying or planning, and all executives who grew to the height of the Duce's shoulders were unceremoniously stunted; while Hitler, still in the fifth year, was unable to do away not only with the two other persons of his trinity, but also with such entities as the Reichsbank in the person of Schacht and the army in the person of Blomberg; and a quantum of liberty, however minimal, still filtered through, as usual when tyranny is shared among several. The blood purge and the concentration camps in Germany had the privilege of coming under the relentless flashlight of Jewish propaganda and of the Western democracies, appalled that such a plight should befall the Germans, a people of Northern cousins belonging to the nobility of nations. But they were neither worse nor better than the Italian islands, lost in the hazy distance, nor the murders in Florence and Turin, forgotten the next day: except for the fact that Hitler, more boldly if not more wisely, had wanted to attend personally the executions in Munich. These considerations are not meant to sketch a eulogy of Nazism or to establish an order of preference, which would be as absurd as it would be revolting, between blacker and blackest. Their meaning is that nothing except racial and group interests or imaginative biases justifies the current opinion according to which Nazism is a far more gruesome monstrosity than Fascism: let alone the discriminations of such statesmen as Mayor La Guardia, lashing Hitler in the face and honouring with friendly mien the pro-Fascist celebrations in the city of New York. At least until 1937 the thoroughness of the Italian tyranny, estimated in its

components of stupidity and fury, stood still unparalleled in the memories of the past as well as in the experiences of the present; and the helm of human reversion still rested in the hand of the Roman pilot, although the movement had been transmitted for nearly five years to a larger wheel.

The disproportion between Germany and Italy, that is, between the forces of which the two dictatorial engines dispose, has usually been exaggerated by common opinion, but it is none the less a substantial one. Not only are the Germans more numerous, not only do they occupy a territory which nature has made richer in resources and less exposed to British control of the seas; they also have on an average a somewhat higher intellectual and technical skill and an imposingly more consistent military tradition. In addition to such permanent advantages, a particular moral situation had grown out of the Treaty of Versailles, against the offending residues of which Nazism could wage its fight with a fair confidence that the resistance of the Western Powers would be crippled first by the secession of Italy and the indifference of America, secondly by the guilty consciences of France and England themselves, and consequently and finally by the universally foregone conclusion that the Treaty of Versailles was sinking into the waste-basket anyway. The situation of Mussolini, even from a moral angle, appeared weaker. Since neither he nor many others in the world at large earnestly believed in Italy's being a victim of the peace treaties, his diplomatic and military moves assumed a telltale style of attempted robberies, and for long years were resisted as such. These remarks explain the difference of results in the field of international competition which was paramount to both branches of Fascism. While in the first five years of his reign Mussolini had been unable to score anything except the humiliation of Corfu, all the actions of Hitler proved roundly successful. Nay, from his early days the latter had been able to allow himself the pleasure of duplicating the blow which Japan had inflicted a few months earlier on the League of Nations; he too,

in October 1933, had slammed the door at Geneva: a luxury which for Mussolini was and was long to be sour grapes.

Apart from these and such other discrepancies as history and nature, never idly repetitious even in twins, drew between the two phenomena, Nazism both in theory and in practice was a surprisingly faithful reproduction of Fascism on a larger scale. It echoed the word, it incorporated into full-blooded Germanism the Roman salute, it repeated the contrivances of the machinery of propaganda, it copied with devoutest meticulousity the institutions and laws. The German thralls translated, not slackly in their turn, into whispered Antinazi German a suitable selection of Italian Antifascist witticisms. To be sure, totalitarianism pushed on by the steamroller state had been a feature of Lenin's Russia two years or so before the invention of Fascism, which had learned the lesson from that country. But then why not also from Robespierre's France or Cromwell's England? They had been fairly totalitarian too. The originality of Fascism consisted in subjecting the methods of the leftist revolutions and the technique of the machine age to the purpose of a retrograde or lawless subversion, and in substituting the idea of power for the idea of justice. This is the field in which Italian Fascism was the model and German Nazism the copy.

Why and how it happened are questions which—apart from such elements as in any happening remain refractory to analysis—cannot be answered unless the systems of interpretation of history prevailing in our age are superseded by one more comprehensive. Undoubtedly actual motives of political unrest and economic disorder were far more operative in the German reversal than they had been in the Italian. The bitterness in large sections of the German ruling classes against the Treaty of Versailles was quite real as compared with the Italian excitement about the alleged loss of Dalmatia, which had been merely an artifice. In addition to this the repercussions of the economic world-depression had impinged heavily on the none too sound economy of Germany, and the Communist party had grown loud.



It is highly probable, however, that these motivations would have remained neutral stuff had not a spark been released, from another section of the national mind, to ignite the heap.

It has been sufficiently stressed in the course of this narrative that no objection should be raised to the economic interpretation of history, provided it is taken in its circumscribed value as a method adequately illuminating an inadequate sector of a far wider reality. The same may be said about the psychoanalysis of the neuroses, as worked out by the Freudian school, which is the second greatest contribution of contemporary science to a more penetrating study of individual and collective behaviour. Of researches, and gossip, trying to make clear that Hitler and Mussolini as well as a choice party of their acolytes are degenerates, there is no scarcity; nevertheless they have been overlooked in this narrative not so much because of their confused smell as because they miss the point. The point, even if the conclusions reached in the Freudian confessional were imperative, is why and how these degenerates could sweep their nations and shake the world. Likewise in the economic and political field there is help to intelligence, though a limited help, in showing how angry Germany was after the Treaty of Versailles, how upset the German lower bourgeoisie and how scared the German plutocrats were after the storm in Wall Street. It is a limited help, unless one tries to prove that backgrounds of that kind normally give and gave analogous effects everywhere: which assumption is hopeless. If economic unrest were the decisive factor of Fascism, the real place for Fascism should have been America after October 1929. If military defeat were its fundamental element, the real place for Fascism should have been Russia in 1917. Supposing that the most propitious circumstances for Fascism are made up of military and political defeat plus economic collapse, the real birthplace of Fascism should have been Germany in 1919 or immediately thereafter, when that nation, highly industrialized, socially polarized, and caught now be-

tween external disaster and internal ruin, more than fulfilled the requirements set by the Marxian theory for a class war to the finish. But the gods decided otherwise, and Fascism, the unpredictable, sprouted—of all places—in Italy. In Germany the seed lay buried for full fourteen years, and when at last it broke through the clod, true, there was the aftermath of the world-depression to account for the astonishing upthrust, but the consequences of the depression by no means stood comparison with the inflationary deluge soon after the war; true, there were still a few visible remnants of what had been the stronghold of the Treaty of Versailles, but they too were decaying at highest speed, and no sensible person in Germany or elsewhere entertained the slightest doubt that Germany, with Stresemann or Brüning, with a marshal or a tribune, would do away with them very shortly anyway.

What the gods keep in store for the future nobody exactly knows, and the difference between the natural sciences, which deal with the laws of matter, and the social sciences, which deal with the creations of the mind, lays bare sufficiently why revolutions and wars are less predictable than tides and eclipses. But the past, and why and how the gods decided one way rather than another, are intelligible to some extent, and the intelligence of the past, if not imprisoned within too narrow blinkers, may even yield some spare hints of wisdom for the future. The pan-economism and the pan-sexualism of recent years need careful trimming, and in the place of their exaggerations a more thoughtful inquiry must be addressed to another among the many abodes of the gods. This abode, too commanding to be ignored, is the faculty of the mind where men preserve the patterns of their imaginative habits, thus shaping along lines of hereditary education the myths of their individual and collective desires, and steering, whether they know or not, their wills and destinies. Imagination also, no less than the other faculties of the mind, should be under the control of reason and of the

will. Therefore the necessity or determinism of history, contemplated from this angle, should appear as the discharge into reality of the freedom of the will.

But the ultimate conquests of this freedom are reserved to a few exceptional personalities, called heroes, who finally succeed in silencing the call of the Mothers and using the bridges as bridges should be used; that is, as passages to other shores. The groups and masses are obdurately conservative, and the dead are powerful. It took centuries of experiments and revolutions ere England herself could draw, however sketchily, a code of modern life not altogether dependent on the rules of a misunderstood antiquity; and France, a modern France, is still in the making.

The map of Europe as it was cast by the religious upheaval of the Renaissance offers a striking instance of the imaginative and educational patterns in their conservative permanence. It is common knowledge that the countries which had not known the rule of Rome fell to Protestantism, while the territories of the old Roman Western Empire, which had died ten centuries earlier, remained to the Roman Church. To be sure, the reactions were not so infinitesimally rigorous as those that can be worked out in a laboratory of chemistry; they reached, however, a stupendous degree of approximation. Nay, England, which had been neither fully Roman nor entirely barbaric, produced in her national Church a surprising compound in which the Protestant and the Catholic elements were balanced in fairly the same proportions as the Northern and the Latin cells in the body of her language.

Similar distributions in the magnetic fields of imaginative gravitations are shown by the map of Europe during the new upheaval which we are witnessing. Fascism rose and won in the countries, Italy and Germany, where the tradition of the Roman world Empire had struck profoundest and most persistent roots. The real core of Nazism is the medieval universal Roman Empire of the German Nation. As a political entity,

more or less frustrated by the urge of a new life, this Empire had lived through a thousand years; as a nominal authority it had not been suppressed until 1806; as an emotional myth it had never been disowned. The death of this clumsy giant, in the tempo of history, was so recent that artificial respiration could well be tried. Nazism tried it; or in German words, Nazism woke up Kaiser Friedrich Barbarossa in his sleepy Kyffhäuser, for he had never died.

The ghost of the Roman Empire, whether Italian in the mind of the Italian prophets and literati or German in the action of the Northern war-lords from Charlemagne to the Ottos and from the Hohenstaufens to the Habsburgs, was always closely connected, if not with the spirit of Christianity, at least with the half-Christian doctrine and discipline of the Roman Church. The antagonisms between Empire and Church were extrinsic episodes, however innumerable; connivance, however often impaired by irreconcilable ambitions, was intrinsic. If the personality of Mussolini is dealt with as palimpsests and repainted canvases are treated by experts, the conscious but adventitious layers of modern culture, Machiavelli and Nietzsche, socialism and anarchism, finally vanish, and there he emerges, the Roman from Romagna, the upshot of an unbroken lineage of Papal subjects. Likewise, although less credibly at first, it is the Austrian low-class neophyte, brought up in an environment of Empire, Jesuitism, Inquisition, and Baroque, who amounts to something in the personality of Hitler, the Austrian who conquered Germany anew; and the Aryan and Pagan make-up which he borrowed from some unwatched dressing room in the Wagnerian opera will fade from his perplexing head under the sun of history, if the sun is to shine long enough above that head.

Thus it was and is the double-headed Minotaur of ancient imperial glory and of half-Christian mythology, which Dante himself had been unfortunate enough to lodge in his beautiful temple of the reviving man; it was and is this man-eating absurdity which over and over again refused to be dislodged and

which claimed and claims victims by the millions. The Emperor as Antichrist and the Church as Babylon had been for the rest fairly clearly announced since the Book of Revelation. The Fascist-Nazi state, in the light of the events which developed between 1929 and 1933, is and increasingly tends to appear as the political embodiment of the Church in the spirit of its second Counter-Reformation and in the style of a neo-classic counterfeit. Neither was the struggle between Nazism and the Catholic Church in the following years more substantial at bottom than had been the quarrel between Fascism and Papacy which started in 1929 and ended two years later in so happy an embrace: however different might loom the outcome according to the changing alinement of world forces.

The spirit of Protestantism had receded meanwhile to the Western democracies, while powerful survivals of the Eastern creed and of the Byzantine Church were invisibly at work in the Russian state. Consciousness of such permanences in our minds should help us not only to know for the pride of knowing, but to overcome the spell of deadly inherited habits. So unaware are men as a rule of the monotony of their inventions that the Pope and his allies, the dictators, would hardly take it as a matter of fact if they were told that all their talk of Anticommunist front and Antibolshevist crusades is, exactly, the very same outcry of the crusades of eight centuries ago, with the very same emotional and economic backgrounds although with Moscow substituted for Jerusalem and Constantinople.

It is now clear also why the process of Fascism was so slow in Germany as compared with its sudden rise in Italy, a contrast which implies some obvious connotations about the ensuing course of both diseases. Several threads of grotesque run through the serious tissues of history, making it the more pathetic. One of them describes the mutual relations between the German and the Italian mind. The Germans in their far past received too little of classic education and the Italians too much; the latter were overfed of antiquity, and the former underfed, with con-

sequences from the surplus and the deficiency which happened to be strangely complementary in the abnormality of both behaviours. It happened, in other words, that for nearly two thousand years the Germans untiringly pilgrimed to Italy, to the heiress of the old world, to the custodian of undying wisdom, taking back to their woods whatever elf or bogy the Italians had chanced upon in the inexhaustible persistence of their imaginations, and nursing it to full maturity in the merciless, humourless profundity of their own brains.

A Roman author, Tacitus, had written a pamphlet, *Germania*, mixing a certain amount of information about the almost unexplored North with a more conspicuous amount of suggestion from the poetic tradition of the Golden Age and of political intentions driving at a contrast between the decay and servitude of Roman civilization and the supposed beauty of primitivism and barbarianism. A number of centuries thereafter, when the writings of Tacitus were unearthed and the Germans had learned to read, they took him literally, making by and by of the Latin pamphlet the charter of German purity, chivalry, blondness, and missionary primacy in a world of darkening nations which badly needed a redeemer-people elect. In the Middle Ages it was naturally the Latins who guarded from oblivion the myth of the Roman Empire; but it was the German nation which put up with the parturition of the Holy Roman Empire, that gouty giant. Then Luther rose, a felicitous exception at least for a few years of his career, a dissenter and the first of victorious dissenters in history; but he could not prevent himself and his nation from shortly afterwards imitating the sectarian obsessions and political distractions with which the Italians had wrecked the edifice of their Renaissance. Three centuries elapsed and up came Italy again in the Risorgimento. Down went Germany again, beyond the Alps, there in the wonted school to learn the new lesson of the revival of nations. She had, indeed, her own assets in the growth of Prussia and in the trophies of the Anti-napoleonic wars; nevertheless it was in the fresh footsteps of

Cavour that Bismarck walked, at an interval of few years, making of Cavour's technique a thing as much bigger as it was less nice. A half-century later Fascism blossomed in the land of orange blossoms and political theories. Down again went the Germans to look and learn. In that case also they were entitled to claim a share in the invention; they had, indeed, painstakingly elaborated into some score of systematic philosophies the heroic furores of Machiavelli; and of taking and giving in the exchange of finished and half-finished products there was no reckoning between the two ideological factories on either side of the Alps. Nevertheless, it seems as though the Germans, in the usual bashfulness and hesitance of their political imagination, would never dare unless their teacher Italy set the example. Italy, the smaller, showed that something like Fascism was feasible. Germany did it, as usual on a larger scale.

On the whole the inventions of the Italian political mind had remained the apange of more or less disarmed prophets: Popes, from the investitures to the Syllabus; authors, from Dante and Petrarch to d'Annunzio and Pareto. Either their beauty had been an inspiration for all the world, or their insanity had been harmless on the whole, except to the Italians themselves. But there is in history a tendency, tragic and grotesque at once, which, as soon as the Italian phantoms migrate to Germany, makes of them real Frankenstein monsters, with real fists and jaws. Fascism had been all but harmless; the world, however, for reasons now not wholly unclear, had not wanted to see it. Who in the world did care much about Italian Fascism in the years between the Matteotti affair and the chancellorship of Hitler? The spider kept spinning its web in a rather private corner. With the ascendancy of Nazism the picture changed. The proportions grew alarming.

One instance may suffice: the Reichstag fire. Apart from the tradition of Nero burning Rome and laying the blame at the doors of the early Christians to have a purge of those Reds, the suggestions for the performance in Berlin came from the im-

mediate vicinity of Italian Fascism. In March 1921 a bomb handled by self-styled red terrorists had gone off in the Diana Theatre in Milan, damaging the building and causing several casualties. The ensuing terror and pity proved strongly conducive to the rising popularity of Fascism. Now, it was highly desirable that Communists in Berlin should bring about something similar, incidentally and into the bargain choosing instead of a simple theatre the building consecrated to Parliamentary freedom, which Nazism most loathed. If such an event lacked the spontaneity required to happen of itself, help could be given. In Fascist Italy the police had certainly not invented, but they had industriously perfected, the art of framing conspiracies and attempts, or of smuggling explosives and prohibited printed matter into the lodgings of those whom they wished either to take in charge at home or to make undesirable to governments abroad. A combination of the blast in the Diana with the skill of the Fascist police provided the cues to the Reichstag scenario. But the final outcome was so comprehensive and grandiose as to outshine by far the fragmentary Italian inspirations which had presided over the conception. The flare filled the skies. However considerate they might be toward Italian Fascism, La Guardia, the mayor of New York, and Mundelein, the cardinal of Chicago, could not help blinking.



## *Writings on the Walls*

THE big event of Germany's joining Fascism served the purpose of Mussolini in two ways. For one thing, it was now certain that his political idea had become a powerful factor in the contemporary world. The evangelization of Germany, a pivotal nation, had promoted his personal and local invention to universality, and no one was allowed any longer to treat in a light mood a mental and social metamorphosis which had made black-brown so large a stripe of earth from South to North, cutting East and West apart and laying a double-edged sword between the liberal civilizations and the Russian effort. It looked as though Fascism had succeeded in repeating the posture of the imperial armies in the World War when Russia and the West, right at the start, were severed. This contemplation heightened his pride and confidence in himself and in his star, thus spurring his lust for action. More objectively, he could now step at last out of the isolation in which he had languished for ten years, confined within the limits of a nation smaller than he, and ogling whatever volatile associations and inconclusive complicities might look inviting in the crowd of nations much smaller than Italy and of contemptible famuli. This partner, Germany, was tall; and the trumps were superb which she was going to bring into the common gamble.

It is to the credit of Mussolini that, although he had been none too sanguine of a Hitlerite success until at least 1930, he had consistently acted as if he were so. He had supplied his German pupils with funds and advice, in addition to the constant incentive of his example. To visitors from their country, several years before the brown victory, he had publicly disclosed

that had he been a German he would have felt ashamed of the boundaries which the Treaty of Versailles had forced upon Germany. But the pupils lagged. The Beerhall putsch staged by Hitler in Munich as early as 1923, only a few months after the March on Rome, had been stamped out at the very place and moment of its start. Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, a digest of Italian Fascism applied to German circumstances and precedents, had fallen short of capturing large audiences, however well trained German audiences might have been in weighty readings. Even Hindenburg, the president of the German republic, who conformably to his militaristic background should have felt more drawn to Fascism than had the Italian king, had opposed a firm resistance when Hitler with the frankness of the proud disciple had asked "as much power as Herr Mussolini wields in Italy." Then suddenly the Hindenburg line crumbled and everything with it, and not even the sham of a march on Berlin was needed to disgrace the ruins. The perseverance of Mussolini was rewarded with a colossal victory.

There are, however, Pyrrhic victories; and the drawbacks of so happy an upturn were such as to become promptly clear even to less experienced observers than Mussolini. One immediate effect was that Hitler, greatened by the greatness of his nation, occupied to a very large extent the stage of public attention, stealing, as it were, from his elder colleague the honours of the front page and pushing him into a secondary position. So deeply rooted in too many minds was the high-school habit of thinking as though three or four major nations alone were allowed to participate effectively in the making of history, that no sooner had Fascism acclimated itself in Germany than it became for most a quite German thing; and the fact that something like it had materialized eight or eleven years previously in Italy was almost put aside as an inexplicable but rather uninteresting trick of chronology. This distortion of so many minds, whether spontaneous or induced, had doubtless its good side for Italian Fascism. Millions, incensed at what Nazism was perpetrating against

Germans and Jews, found in their indignation one motive more to be lenient toward Italian Fascism, which so far had hurt, so they thought, the Italians alone. Not long after the Nazi rise Pertinax, a French newspaperman, issued a comparative appreciation showing how bad the barbarian dictator (a menace to France and civilization) was in comparison with the noble restorer of Roman tradition in Italy; and even four years later Mrs. Wise, the wife of the New York rabbi, while fiercely indicting world-Fascism as a world-peril and urging such defensive measures as the boycott of Nazi Germany, covered under the mantle of benevolent preterition Italian Fascism, which so far had hurt none—or thus it seemed—except Italians and Ethiopians. Such ignorances or connivances provided Italian Fascism with a supplementary screen behind which the pursuit of its aims might be profitably concealed; but this tactical gain hardly compensated for the loss in personal and ideological glory. The lot of the precursor is none too attractive; and the bitterness of Mussolini at the sight of his disciple climbing so nimbly the ladder of celebrity found occasional vent in a few editorials which he penned for his *Popolo d'Italia*, railing at the mate of that short honeymoon, the German *Führer*.

These moods of personal jealousy, however, might be controlled, and they were so. But what if in the world of real power and of opportunities for the future, the lion's share which world-publicity was now granting to Hitler were somehow proportional to the real size of Germany as compared with Italy's? What if a sarcastic destiny curbed him, Mussolini, to be for Hitler what Crispi in bygone years had been for Bismarck, an ambitious vassal, a tool? It was the Latins who untiringly had kept alive the Roman imperial idea through the ages, but it was the Germans who had made something of it, however badly; and it seemed a law that no Roman Empire can be built again unless it be a Roman Empire of the German Nation. Although no one could X-ray the soliloquies of the Duce in those months and

seasons, it is permissible to guess that the popular simile of the cuckoo's egg was not absent from his inward language.

Apart from any inferiority in number and resources, he knew fairly well the psychological differences between Italians and Germans. His countrymen, unrestrained in fancy, as a rule were inclined to soberness in criticism, and the sublimity or insanity of their imaginative flights was tempered with the ironical wisdom of a slowly ripened civilization. In the present case an adage in Italy said that "two Italians together are regularly Fascists, but one Italian alone is always Antifascist"; and how could it be otherwise if the founder and leader himself had known nothing of Fascism until he was almost forty years old? But the same thing could not be said about the Germans, whose armoured earnestness defeats those subtleties of the more refined Italian mind which, however regrettable in the exercise of virtue, prove often salutary in the practice of vice. It must have been rather disconcerting for Mussolini to realize how deeply many of his Northern disciples believed in things which he had invented out of whole cloth, hence inferring that Germany, in addition to her larger supply of metals, coal, timber, and cannon fodder, could dispose of a higher potential of faith. There was more of Germany—and of Hitler—behind Hitler than there was of Italy and of Mussolini's soul behind Mussolini; and the very title of "Duce," *Dux*, remained a Latin fossil inserted in the Italian language with a slight connotation of pedantical humour, while *Führer*, its literal translation into German, sounded none the less a legitimate German vocable. Indeed, the foreign soil, the Prussian soil, seemed more receptive of the new religion, as had happened at other times with other religions and devilries, which had been embraced more eagerly abroad than in their native districts; and, supposing that a cat might pride herself on having borne a tiger cub, the pleasure would be spoiled by the sight of the offspring's growth.

Nazism grew quickly, and in a fit of boyish appetite it reached

for Austria with one of its paws. This was crucial for Mussolini. The military and territorial reasons for this early estrangement between the two dictators have been grossly exaggerated by a world-opinion lulling itself into the delusion that Austria was too wide and too permanent a chasm between Fascism and Nazism for any bridge to span it. There were strategists enough in Italy to know that it is not the narrow band of Austrian Tirol between the Alps and the German border which would make more or less frightening in modern warfare the German armies, should they feel a renovated urge southward. True, the close vicinity of Pangermanism might breed unrest in Italian Tirol, where two hundred thousand Germans have lost at the hand of Fascism even the free use of their language; but there are arrangements with Hell as well as with Heaven, nor is it by such small figures as hundreds of thousands that these conquerors count their future subjects. In given circumstances, all Austria might well have been not too high a price for the chances which an alliance with Germany would offer for the building of a Roman Empire: this world of ours being still large enough, at least temporarily, for two world Empires.

The real trouble was that those "given circumstances" were not given as yet. From the dawn of 1933 to the close of 1935, from the rise of Hitler to the Ethiopian war, Mussolini, as far as tangible results were concerned, stood where he had stood from 1923 to 1933. He had won no war, he had annexed no square inch of conquered territory. Had he given in, had he lent a passive consent to so conspicuous a remapping of Europe as to paint in Nazi colours such a spot as Vienna, while remaining himself empty-handed in his old Fascist corner, he would have knowingly degraded himself to an underling. This he could not have. Besides, the loss in prestige would have entailed other unbearable losses. No sheep in the fold was dearer than Austria to the pastor in the Vatican City; the permanence of her independence was paramount in the plans of the second Counter-Reformation, at least as long as Nazism, still conversant with Thor and Wotan

and other demons, was not won back to true religion; and the weakness of Mussolini would have been resented deeply in the Roman Curia. He could not afford to risk the only friendship in which he trusted.

The Nazi danger in Austria was met with timely moves of two sorts. For one thing, the Austrian Government, inspired from on high, proceeded to a comprehensive massacre of the Socialists in Vienna, paving with those corpses the way to a fully Fascist-Catholic Austrian state of the Italian type and under Mussolini's suzerainty. Shortly afterwards, as Hitler peered too intensely through the Austrian fence, Mussolini thundered and mobilized. He was sure of French and British support. He could do it anyway. Nazism backed to its lair.

Western democratic Europe, especially France, rejoiced in her heart. Generations of bureaucrats had trodden or driven to the Foreign Office and to the Quai d'Orsay, memorizing the well-known diplomatic geography of Europe, where Austria had had for centuries as definite a place as a zodiacal sign for æons in the firmament. A Europe without Austria would have been a universe out of joint, unintelligible. They now breathed freely. They genuinely thought that Austria, even the stump of Austria, even the name of Austria, would always work as a mighty hindrance against the hunger of Prussia; for thus had it happened some time in a past that was faithfully recorded in their files. They felicitated—more discreetly in Britain, more heartily in France—Mussolini, the sage dictator, the reborn Augustus, while mitigating some exuberance of his and begging him to postpone a march on Vienna which, although not strictly necessary, would have been as glorious as the March on Rome. They also complimented themselves for having taken the Nazi chestnut with the Fascist paw, and for the insight which had prevented them from believing that a real wedlock might come out of the engagement between Nazism and Fascism, or, as they put it, between Prussia and Italy. This had not happened in 1914, and it could never happen; because the future is the past,

and the past was in their files. It seemed as though Europe in spite of stormy areas was headed toward a better world, safe for democracy plus Fascism against Nazism minus Communism.

However immoderately senseless such a combination may appear to many nowadays and may have appeared at that time to a few better-equipped minds, it was not altogether without a foundation of reasonableness in the outline of what ought to have been a reasonable course for Mussolini. Had he been possessed of a modicum of sanity he would have soon realized what an awful plight had been provided to him as well as to the others by the Fascistization of Germany; and like the apprentice sorcerer who had evoked the devil, he would have wished but to get rid of him. The idea of keeping up an independent Roman Empire under the eyes and guns of a hundred million Germans holding Europe some day from the Ukraine to Belgium and from Denmark to Tirol, was nothing short of dementia. To draw nearer, and definitely, to the Western nations in mutual self-defence, to negotiate with them what commercial and colonial settlements might save his face, and to restore gradually a minimum of decency and justice in Italy: such were the advices not so much of patriotism and wisdom as of sheer self-preservation. But the lack of common sense in those who were hopeful lay just in the presumption that such a thing as common sense might inspire the man. He stuck to what he called idealism: that is, to the belief that an anarchical and superhuman will can and must violate the nature of things. So many incredibilities had come true from the childhood in Predappio to Palazzo Venezia; then why not another one? Romulus and Remus according to the story had together laid the foundations of Rome; then Romulus killed Remus and survived alone. There was no reason in the world of dreams why Germany should not play the role of Remus once Fascism and Nazism had celebrated the common victory and inaugurated the twin Empires.

The Austrian trouble—soon after the mysterious assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss and the brief storm which ensued—was

adjourned, possibly until the day of the big spoils. As a last resource for the maintenance of Austria as a separate entity Mussolini could dispose of the restoration of the Habsburgs. This plan might have pleased many people of an even better standing than absentee landowners, unemployed courtiers, and ageing ballerinas in the erstwhile metropolis of waltz and morganatic love. It was a balm to the heart of the Pope, it came handy to the political plan of official France, nor was it distasteful to those in the British dynasty and peerage who were feeling lonely in this plebeian world. It might work, besides, like a very good stone to kill two pigeons at once: namely, to safeguard Austria from Nazism and to spread turmoil in the successor states, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, belonging to the loathed Little Entente. On the other hand, a resurrected Habsburg monarchy with its desired or undesired attraction for the bordering nations, would curtail the influence of Mussolini in the Danubian area, making headway in the best of cases for a resurrected Triple Alliance, in which perhaps Italy would be good second instead of the bad third she had been in Bismarck's time. Such a promotion had been the dream of Sonnino, but could not satisfy the new man. In the worst of cases a peremptory halt to Hitler on his road to Vienna might have meant an irreparable split between Nazism and Fascism: which Mussolini did not wish. He weighed the pros and cons, and weighed them over again, with the final result that he made the decision of making none. One day he would urgently rush the plan for the Habsburg restoration, then drop it the next day and into the bargain hurl a contumelious editorial at that stunned junior, the pretender Otto. Finally it was agreed that for a time the Austrian apple of contention should be left hanging on the tree.

By and by the wound in the Fascist-Nazi friendship healed, as was in the nature of things. For about three years, until almost the close of the Ethiopian war in the spring of 1936, the two behaved like the thieves of Pisa in the Italian proverb, who quarrel by day and act jointly by night. One instance is seen in their



complementary attitudes toward the League of Nations. Hitler, the stronger, damaged it severely by slamming its door; Mussolini, unable to do likewise, did his best to sabotage the building from within; the fellow outside and the one inside were practically attending to the same job.

The purpose of Mussolini had not changed. It was the well-known compromise between the fox and the lion, with the fox first; the repetition on a much larger scale of his technique in 1922 and 1925, with equally adequate reserves of security. He wanted war, a world war; he wanted, however, to have it started by somebody else and somewhere else, thus avoiding the network of conciliatory procedures and the brunt of the first reactions, and taking at the right moment as many chances with as few risks as possible. Hitlerite Germany afforded a stupendous camp of manoeuvre. But Machiavelli, one of his Gospels, had warned: "And here is to be noticed that a prince must be careful never to make company with one more powerful than he, in attacking others, unless necessity compel him, as said above; because, once they have won, he remains at the discretion of the stronger, and being at discretion of others is what princes should shun to the utmost of their power."

Hence descended an imperative rule of conduct: to hold in abeyance the growth of Hitler while growing himself. One instrument at his disposal was the Roman Church. He used it, at the same time being used by it, whenever and wherever an opportunity for common action invited them: in Austria to check Nazism, in Germany herself to bridle its course, in Asia and Africa to perturb the empires of atheistic France and schismatic Britain, arousing also the Moslems against the Jews, protégés of Britain. The Spanish opportunities had not yet appeared distinctly on the horizon. From those moments on not the slightest rift ever became visible between the international policies of Roman Fascism and of the Roman Church; one was the will and the other was the hand; which was which scarcely matters at present.

Other expedients were tried in the diplomatic play. Exercise, certainly, had made Mussolini fitter; the regression of the Western diplomacies to a state of infantilism did the rest. He went so far as to bid for a round which he called the Four Power Pact. The idea was to vest the decisions on all European affairs in a supreme and secret court made up of Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, to the exclusion of all other parties concerned. The ideas behind the idea were to do away for ever with the democratic fad of diplomacy in the open, to make of the League of Nations a laughing stock, and to raise an impassable barrier between France and Russia. Moreover, being neither so blunt as the Germans nor so panicky as the French nor so double-minded as the English, he felt sure enough of playing the ones against the others and of using his invention as a stratagem to blast the universe. This time his confidence proved excessive. The Four Power Pact was drafted and signed, but never ratified. Even the *opéra bouffe* citadel of Western statesmanship could strain at last to resist the insistent temptation and to decline the gift of so telltale a Trojan horse.

A real advance in might and prominence was unattainable by any means other than real war and conquest. It was the eve of 1935, the date he had set long since for the beginning of the five-year wrecking plan. His brother Arnaldo had died suddenly at the end of 1931, leaving another warning of the short-livedness hereditary in the Mussolini family. At any rate, his own fifty-fifth birthday, a landmark in any ambitious life, awaited him at admonitory propinquity. Dissatisfaction and sarcasm were rankling in the impoverished country; fear lest they might find expression in unpremeditated revolt stirred the antennæ of his attention. He himself admitted that the bottom of economic depression had been reached, and that there was no way further down. War, the initial purpose of his career, had now also become the only way out.

Writings on the walls, in cubital characters drafted with chalk by unknown hands, had occasionally arrested the traveller in his

promenades through Italy. They said: "War in 1935." The announcement came now unmistakably clear from Mussolini's own lips.

He spoke to the country in June 1934. His declarations were printed in his personal review *Gerarchia* (Hierarchy). He said: "The terrible question-mark weighing on the mind of the multitudes from the dawn of history to our day is this: shall it be peace or shall it be war?—To begin with, history tells us that war is the phenomenon which accompanies the development of mankind. Maybe it is the tragic destiny weighing on man. War is for man what motherhood is for woman. Proudhon used to say: War is of divine origin.—Heraclitus, the sombre man of Ephesus, finds war at the origin of all things. In the Encyclopædia I have established my theory, with utmost precision, from a philosophical angle; not only do I not believe in everlasting peace, but I would also hold it as depressing and destructive of the basic virtues of man, which only in a bloody effort can shine in the full light of the sun. This is our doctrinal attitude. Political life, our interests, the work of domestic reconstruction to which we are applying ourselves, make a long period of peace desirable. However, should the dramatic alternative materialize, the Italian people, educated and ranked under the aristocracies of the Fasces, will face the events with full tranquillity, with conscious discipline, with firmest will."

Uncertainty, as usual, reigned concerning the place where war might best be made to start. Having tried in vain for over ten years all sore spots within the reach of the Fascist hand, and having made sore—no less vainly—a few more, there seemed to be no chance except in reverting to the point of departure, Yugoslavia, with Dalmatia.

It was common belief among the nationalists in Italy that Yugoslavia was merely a castle of cards put together by Wilson and Clemenceau with the complicity of a few English journalists and Italian traitors, and with the sole purpose of annoying Italy. It had no roots in history, in language, in religion, and was

doomed to crumble at the first gust of wind. This gust could be nursed, and nursed it was. The difficulties, partly natural and partly induced, of the immature kingdom were weathered well or badly by the dictator-king Alexander. It was common belief among the nationalists in Italy that if anything happened to the king something must happen to the kingdom too; in which case the dangerous situation of the Italians in Dalmatia would call for an immediate intervention of Italy as a matter of course, with no objection from Geneva or Paris loud enough to be heard in such a storm of national passion. Dissenters and conspirators from Croatia and other sections of Yugoslavia were taken care of in Italy and Hungary; they were also educated, in military camps both in the Fascist land and in its annex, Hungary, in the proper use of insurrectional implements. Ante Pavelic, their chief, was a guest of Fascism.

At the beginning of October 1934 Mussolini inserted in a public speech a couple of sibyllic sentences about the relations between Yugoslavia and Fascism. Thereupon he rushed to the lake of Garda, calling on d'Annunzio, whom he had not seen for years. The conqueror of Fiume, who among other objects of worship conserved a clod of Dalmatian earth, enthusiastically welcomed the visitor on the threshold of his mausoleum. His salute was: "At last!"

The king of Yugoslavia and the French minister Barthou, who was unluckily at his side, were assassinated at Marseilles, by Yugoslav terrorists, on October 9. The negotiations between France and Yugoslavia for a closer alliance, pointed at least defensively toward Italy, were hardly enhanced by so mournful an accident. But nothing further happened. No revolution, no war broke out.

Like King Mithridates, who had accustomed himself to unheard-of doses of poison, it was as though Europe had grown gradually immune to any amount of war virus. The shots in Marseilles, considered in themselves and in the intentions, were worse than those in Sarajevo that had kindled the World War.

But nothing happened, and all was quiet on the Eastern front.

Now, a survey of the map seemed to show peace impregnable throughout. Ethiopia, of all places, was left. It was a distant, intricate, ungrateful enterprise; teeming with diplomatic and military riddles; burdening the Duce with the heinousness and peril of an uncamouflaged aggression; promising, if victorious, questionable returns. But there was no choice.

Without delay the king of Italy, idle at home, was dispatched to Somaliland, the old Italian colony on the border of Ethiopia: there to glimpse the skyline of a promised Empire looming above his stature.

## *The Ethiopian Choice*

IT IS common knowledge that Ethiopia had been admitted into the League of Nations in 1923 under the particular sponsorship of the Fascist Government, and that the treaty of friendship and arbitration between Italy and Ethiopia was dated no further back than 1928. As late as 1928, when Mussolini, Herculean but playful, was posing for the camera with the lion cubs with which he had been presented by Haile Selassie, not the slightest thought of war in those remote regions had crept into his mind. Roman tradition suggested the growth of a compact Empire around the centre, rather than scattered dominions in the English style. And nothing at all suggested—however negligible or jocular a treaty may be in itself—the knitting of an extra strand into the diplomatic mesh, with the knots

and snares of which he should have to wrestle before winning a free hand against the victim elect.

Less widely known is it that not earlier than the beginning of 1934 a noted Italian explorer, Franchetti, possibly the best expert on Ethiopia, called on Mussolini and submitted a scheme for the conquest of Ethiopia. What he meant to suggest was not actual warfare, except perhaps incidentally, but systematic bribery of the feudal chieftains against the Negus; and the prospective expense, as estimated by him, was not too high. Mussolini flatly refused. "Not if all of Ethiopia," said he, "were served to me on a silver salver, would I care for it." Before the end of the year he had changed his mind as to that very same conquest, by means other than tips. Now it was Count de Chambrun, the French ambassador to Rome, who called on him. This happened during the lengthy interlude in which Franco-British statesmanship pathetically strove to save both Fascism and peace, or as the Italians would put it, the devil and the holy water. Without firing a shot, the ambassador pleaded, and merely by the understanding efforts of the friendly Western diplomacies, Mussolini could get in Ethiopia, practically for nothing, most of what he might expect from a hard-won victory. The temptation was bravely fought off. It was the military feat, it was the "idealistic" pride of battle, that his nation craved—such was the Duce's rejoinder. If all of Ethiopia were presented to him on a silver salver without its price of glory he would refuse the gift. The silver salver had become his tag.

Violence for the sake of violence was his purpose, and no rationalization of the Ethiopian enterprise would stand the test of reason and fact. Indeed, the comedy staging Ethiopia as the black lamb who was troubling the waters of the harmless wolf, appeared too clumsy even to the most compliant of audiences; and its threadbare tricks, from the incident of Ualual produced in December 1934 to the indictment in September 1935 of Haile Selassie as mobilizing against the Fascist forces, passed without

applause. There were, however, two kinds of rationalization which met more benevolent ears.

The first of them was the accustomed talk about raw materials and the place in the sun, with the talk thereto connected about the two categories of nations in the contemporary world, the haves and the have-nots. It seemed self-evident that Italy belonged among the latter, and that the spirit of distributive equity if not the letter of international law justified Fascism's grabbing for its disinherited people the last lot left on this otherwise altogether pre-empted earth.

That there is a class of propertied nations and a class of disinherited ones is certainly not conducive to peace and brotherhood, and a feeling of justice as well as a foresight for their permanent interests should have suggested to the haves a timely move in order to lower the barrier and to smooth the contrast. On the other hand, no record of the League of Nations shows the Fascist regime or any other have-not affectionately encouraging the haves to that difficult step or eloquently upholding the plan of a world-consortium in which at least the colonial resources should have been merged. Whenever, on the contrary, such a plan was vaguely aired, they looked strangely absent-minded. Indeed, an accord among all nations would have meant peace, permanent peace; and what is the point in getting raw materials if one is denied the use of them, which is lovely war?

This talk, too, like so many others, was mere sham; and Fascism knew it. It knew that the so-called natural resources are for coming generations what well-off parents are for a growing offspring. They help, no doubt, and it is better to have than not to have them; but by no means do they prove decisive for the history of a nation or for the career of an individual. Switzerland, born of nature as indigent as a foundling, grew to a material prosperity and a moral influence which India with all her Golcondas never dreamed of; and the natural resources at the disposal of Athens and of the Italian Communes when the proudest of civilizations came out of the humblest of territories could

be learned in primers for the elementary schools. England herself stood very tall among the nations long before she knew what to do with her sealed coal mines and a considerable time before she owned any imperial province, except Ireland, which from an economic point of view was rather a liability than an asset. Nay, the real rise of England seems almost to have been the effect of her continental defeats, when her dynasty and leading class lost France and all foothold across the Channel and her small population, confined in a rather barren land, remained endowed with hardly any raw material beside their stubborn will and a raging sea. As a rule, which does not need to be further exemplified, men and groups are Midases or Crusoes who can starve in plenty or thrive on destitution. No atom of gold glittered amid the sands of the shallow river Arno when Cosimo de' Medici, the first of modern plutocrats, amassed two thousand kilograms of that attractive metal; oil, rubber, water-power, were mere words devoid of meaning until a few decades ago; and no one can tell the names of the unsuspected raw materials which the ingenuity of a new or revived nation will extort tomorrow from earth or sky, transmuting them into might and wealth.

That such commonplaces were not forbidden mysteries to the culture, however defective, of Mussolini and his peers, is no mere guesswork. In his revolutionary youth he had said: "I would rather have Italy as civilized as little Denmark than as large as China"; nor can a truth so cominmandingly plain, once it has entered a mind, evacuate it without leaving a trace. Much later, already long an involutionary tyrant all absorbed in his hunt for war, he had opposed the defeatist view that depicted Italy as totally bereft of raw materials, and had substituted for it the sounder statement that Italy, like so many other countries, lacks some materials and has some others. The partial shortage of coal and the total deficiency in copper and other metals less essential to production did not prevent him from proclaiming before the general assembly of the Corporations of the Fascist



State that Italy could solve her economic problem "as soon as she exploits her own resources rationally." Even the so much needed oil could be obtained through the distillation of shale. These were and are, in fact, years of alchemical strides in the advance of chemistry and electro-dynamics. Dailies and weeklies, if not immortal books, landed on the Fascist's desk; clippings and hashes of knowledge were served to his however untrained appetite; and he had no way of missing the news that, should international justice and a supernational League fail to do their due, science will take their place, science is taking their place every day, and whoever will have laboratories for synthetical chemistry will have raw materials also.

All these general considerations should have been topped anyway by a particular remark concerning the share of Africa in the world output of raw materials in the present age. This share is none too high, and the legend that contemporary imperial nations live and thrive on the direct exploitation of colonial soils is an exploded one. It was politically profitable to suppose that Ethiopia made an exception to the rule and that her abysses and plateaux concealed fabulous hoards, but the assumption lacked the support of any conclusive research either a year before or a year after the conquest, and the only raw materials which the conquerors so far have dealt with are human flesh and blood. Not the slightest evidence substantiated or substantiates the moronic belief that theft and murder are the only chances for the prosperity of nations or that there is anything in Ethiopia which the Italians might take at a bargain below the market price they ought to pay in a reasonable world.

The second kind of rationalization represented Ethiopia, apart from the real or fancied treasures hidden underground, as a land for farmers and settlers and the only way out for the otherwise insoluble problem of Italian overpopulation. This hoax found most benevolent audiences in Europe and America, but was none the less a hoax. All Africa, subtropical and tropical, had inexorably flouted all hopes of conveying to its expectant solitudes large

masses of immigrants. The Congo, unmeasurable and rich though it is, numbers approximately sixteen thousand whites, a handful; even the northern regions, like Tunisia and Algeria, where conditions are fittest, show but meagre European colonies, most of them urban and half-bureaucratic, sparsely dotting the outermost rim of the continent. Libya, advertised during the pre-Fascist conquest in 1911 and 1912 as an empire of milk and honey and, of course, as the granary of ancient Rome, a country three times as vast as Italy and practically uninhabited, twenty years later did not yet support fifty thousand immigrants; and the efforts of the Fascist governor-general Graziani in exterminating the natives, although so successful in themselves as to merit him among his soldiers the surname of "The Butcher," could enlarge the pre-existent void without opening any new opportunity to the conquerors.

The hypothesis that Ethiopia was to prove an exception to the rule of African hopelessness stressed the particular feature of the Ethiopian territory, where equatorial plateaux seven to ten thousand feet above sea level are blessed with a climate which optimists, unmindful of its treacherous vicissitudes and tryingly thin air, may call bearable or even temperate. This is, however, the same climate, this is the same agricultural opportunity, which the Italians had experienced on the high plateau of Asmara in the old Eritrean colony bordering Ethiopia. They had owned that colony for about fifty years, at the end of which eighty-seven Italian families, not wholly two thousand colonists, had settled in the privileged spot; nor was it clearly explained why a better success should be expected on other and not better plateaux. Proportionately to her known or reasonably predictable resources, Ethiopia was already an over- rather than an under-populated country, with from ten to fourteen million half-naked, half-starved, half-nomad, half-savage natives: whom not even a Graziani could sufficiently rarefy should he ever be promoted—as he actually was after the conquest—from his Libyan apprenticeship to more conspicuous butcheries. Little or nothing, to

sum up, could be anticipated, at least for the span of time which political foresight can behold, except a sub-species of mongrels from conquerors and coloured women. The Italians, indeed, incorrigible serenaders, preluded the military operations with songs caressingly wooing *Faccetta Nera*, "Sweet Little Black-face"; a questionable propensity which the government, after having used its sex appeal to whip up a defective military lust, hurriedly suppressed under laws unquestionably crueller than Nazi racialism. Either as a land for predatory exploitation or as a country for mass colonization, Ethiopia was a daydream of the Italians, the only upshot of which could be a thing worse than a nightmare for the natives. In the Fascist mind that had inspired it, it was not even a dream, it was a wilful lie.

Despite the vast territories which Italy had owned for many years in North and East Africa, her emigrants had followed the familiar treks toward Switzerland, France, and both Americas. There, especially in the United States, she had unloaded her surplus of children, partly unwanted at home and partly undesired abroad. Their dubious breeding, the nakedness in too many cases of their economic impulse, together with the refractory resistance opposed by most of them to the melting pot in the adoptive country, had a share in the derogatory opinion which uninformed foreigners held of contemporary Italy, and consequently in their sympathizing attitude toward Fascism. These swarms, however, while contributing a valuable labour to the nations among which they temporarily or permanently settled, preserved as a rule thriftiness and the whole set of their domestic virtues; their hard-won savings, trickling back to the motherland together with whatever odds and ends of a different civilization even menial workmen had gathered in a less despondent slavery, helped to raise somehow the economic and intellectual level of the humble classes and of the retarding provinces from which they ordinarily originated; and, on the whole, the migratory phenomenon proved beneficial to all parties concerned. The World War with its aftermath brought

it to a standstill; but, omitting the inquiry into how much Fascism was directly responsible for the commercial and racial lockouts which sectioned the continents into water-tight compartments, no record of the League of Nations, no diplomatic negotiation, shows the Fascist Government anxious about securing outlets to the Italian overpopulation in the new worlds, since colonization in Asia and Africa was evidently chimeric. No substantial record credits it with having honestly broached the tasks of at once encouraging and selecting the exportable groups of the overpopulation, of striving for better conditions of labour in South America, of asking in earnest for wider admittances in North America and Australia. No other purpose of Fascism was, on the contrary, more resolute and consistent than the will to curb and throttle all migratory impulse in the Italian people. It is true that the quota allowed to Italy under the new American act on immigration ran as low as about five thousand per year; but no less true is it that under the prohibitive checks worked out by the Fascist Government, only the half of this figure was usually covered, and the opportunity, however slight, and offset later by the depression, was wilfully left dormant all the time. All argument, for the rest, is redundant here, where Mussolini himself told the curt truth when he proclaimed that the kettle of the Italian race must be kept boiling, without leakages, in order that it may explode at last in imperial conquest.

On the other hand, the biological urge which was behind the migratory waves was slowly but steadily subsiding. Instructed both by penury and intelligence the Italians were cutting at a remarkable speed the birth-rate of which they had once been so injudiciously proud. Simple truths, long disregarded, began to dawn on the minds not of the upper classes alone: namely, that perhaps the future will give again to mankind the unrestrained joy of creative love, but that here and now it is a stringent duty not to share among too numerous offspring the scant chances of luck and bread spared by a frightened age. Not even the devoutest Catholic can genuinely believe that hell-fire is the reward for

parents mindful of such duty; nor is high learning required to realize nowadays that uncontrolled fecundity can be an economic gain only in primitive agricultural societies, and that moral barbarism alone can suppose that ceaseless motherhood is the only preventive available against sexual degradation. Fascism, of course, did not care about morality and religion; what it wanted was number and power, with gigantic armies and misery as a stimulus to slaughter. The decrease of the birth-rate was a motive of deep concern for the dictator; but here his dictation failed, and it seemed as though, despite the proverb, not even two Italians together were necessarily Fascist, at least in the privacy within four walls where love, shrinking before the truculence of the command, was not encouraged, either, by the gift of ten or twenty dollars publicly and personally bestowed by Mussolini on deserving mothers. The differences in the output of cannon-fodder among the various regions of Italy are instructively revealed in the latest census. They range from a fecundity of 36 per thousand in the most destitute and illiterate provinces of the South to one of barely nine per thousand in the most progressive provinces of the North; with the predictable consequence, should the Southern peasant persist in his hopeless animality and no better government ever enlighten him, that the Italian race, one of the finest on earth, will gradually sink under an overwhelming majority of pariahs.

However, the problem of Italian overpopulation in one way or another was already taking care of itself, even overlooking the marshes drained or drainable and underpopulated areas like Lucania or Sardinia which still promised food and shelter to millions. These reasons and many others were palpable; but they did not prevent many Italians and foreigners from endorsing the forgery. Not even the contradiction, outrageous though it was, between the Duce's claim that crowded Italy badly needed territorial expansion and his frantic appeal to the Italian women that they might thicken the crowd, could unseal all eyes; and credulity, national and international, was a card in his game.

He knew better about his real purpose. It is as though in the crucial year 1935 he were returning to the books of his youth, and signally to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, the first of his Gospels, the *Prince* of Machiavelli ranging next. He understood Nietzsche as best he could.

Said Zarathustra: "Your enemy shall ye seek; your war shall ye wage. . . . Ye shall love peace as a means to new wars—and the short peace more than the long. You I advise not to work but to fight. You I advise not to peace but to victory. . . . Ye say it is the good cause which halloweth even war? I say unto you: it is the good war which halloweth every cause." The echoes of these verses, despoiled to be sure of their idealistic intention, were unmistakably present in Mussolini's article of June 1934 trumpeting the imminence of war. They were present later when, to a foreign editor, he announced: "Six months hence, all will say I was right." Nay, even the tenet about warring heroism as a counterpart in man of what motherhood is in woman, was half a plagiarism and half a corollary from Zarathustra's apophthegms: "Everything in woman is a riddle, and everything in woman has one solution—it is called pregnancy. . . . Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior: all else is folly."

No Nietzschean war, however, can pass from the incubation of fantasy to the realm of facts unless the self-styled superman disposes of military power and Machiavellian skill. He had a deadline: that same year 1935, the date he had set to himself, at least ten years earlier, for starting his march on the world. Over and over again, in his spoken and written instructions to General de Bono, commander-in-chief in the Italian colony bordering Ethiopia, he insisted on the fatal figure which possessed his mind: "Not later than 1935 . . . Before 1936 . . . Not later than September or October of this year."

There were hardly any differences noticeable between his attitude on the eve of the cold-blooded aggression and the mental behaviour of Gide's Lafcadio, the travelling superman who de-

cides to hurl an unknown passenger from a speeding train for no other purpose than to prove to himself the absolute freedom of his anarchical will.

The preparations and shipments, on unprecedented scale, went on methodically for many months, in Italy and Africa, under the eyes of incredulous Europe. The common opinion still held the whole affair for a parade or at worst for a blackmail.

In conformity with the best rules, he forged a certain number of border incidents, in the hope of maddening Ethiopia into a military initiative, thus appearing before a complacent world-tribunal in the guise of a plaintiff. Haile Selassie, the Negus, a better diplomat than his antagonist, did not budge. His firmness disturbed Mussolini, obviously without changing his mind. "If the Negus has no intention of attacking us," he wrote to de Bono as early as February 26, "we shall ourselves take the initiative."

And yet, his bustling and hustling on the frequented highways of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea should have seemed less safe than Lafcadio's high resolve on a solitary railway. There were international police, made up of France, England, and the League of Nations. Their vigilance he did not like.

France was the first to blink. When a French premier, Laval, landed at last in Rome in January 1935, he was already a convert.

This man's plan was twofold. As a plutocrat, in behalf of the class to which he belonged, he thought it fit to flatter and strengthen Italian Fascism, as a warning to Socialism in France. As a Frenchman, in behalf of his nation, he wooed Fascist friendship or at least neutrality in the Franco-German strife. Besides, he did not dislike it that the African ambitions of Fascism—pointed so far at Tunisia and the Sahara and threatening the French Empire from Bizerta to the Atlantic—should shift eastward, where England rather than France might take the trouble.

It seems accurate that he obtained from Mussolini all the words he wanted. With as many feathers on his cap, he returned to Paris, a triumpher among his fellow-millionaires and fellow-

Sganarelles. Naturally, the older sorcerer had got the better of his French apprentice. It was deeds, not words, that he received for his hollow words.

First, the trial on the assassination of the king of Yugoslavia was choked in pious silence. Even the kin in Belgrade had to be satisfied to let bygones be bygones. The mystery rotted with the bodies.

Secondly, free rein was allowed to Fascism in Ethiopia, as far as France was concerned. This gain raised substantially the chances of Mussolini in the diplomatic game, which he played thenceforth with a trump in his sleeve.

Nevertheless, the assistance of Laval's France could be nothing more than left-handed and stealthy. To foil the League openly or to clash with England was beyond her power and wish. So long as the League and England did not default, the bid of the Duce, in spite of the initial advantage, looked risky enough.

Encumbered with the double-mindedness of France, the League had now one possibility of guidance, in England. From January 1935 on, the burden of civilization and peace fell almost entirely upon the shoulders of this nation.

Why England defaulted, thus precipitating Europe into a confusion worse than any other the world has experienced since the downfall of the Roman Empire, is a riddle to all who lack insight into the English and Anglo-Saxon mentality. It is therefore a riddle to most English and Anglo-Saxons themselves.



## England Defaults

KITTREDGE, the famed Shakespeare scholar, investigated with his usual keenness the character and career of Iago in an attempt to explain the latter's feelings and actions as the results of motives wholly intelligible and partly even forgivable. Whether or not his cross-examination succeeded in solving the ultimate knot of that Shakespearian skein, is obviously a question-mark outside the range of problems with which these pages are dealing. But it seems plausible to admit that among the inspirations working behind such intellectual efforts as Kittredge's, one is the aversion of English and Anglo-Saxon minds to the idea of sheer evil, of all-round villainy, and their kindly inclination to catalogue even the most appalling of human perversions under the everyday psychological headings of environment and extenuating circumstances.

For the same reason it is rather unusual to find in the English-speaking public convinced readers of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, except for the anthological passages consecrated in high-school tradition. Satan is a glorified Iago, whose metaphysical wickedness looms on sobered generations like an abuse of common sense. Should the magnificent story be taken literally, it would seem fair to blame some of the arch-devil's viciousness on God Almighty, as Iago's on his superiors, and there is consensus in intimating that the poet himself, at the bottom of his heart, could not help sympathizing with his cosmic rascal.

Milton, and to some extent Shakespeare as well, were still rooted in a tragic age, digging deep ditches between Beauty and Ugliness, Truth and Error, Good and Evil, and treating this double set of concepts as final essences in a dualistic universe. A

highly developed civilization, such as matured later in Britain and in the nations of British descent, merges these contrasts in the fluidity of a continuum, where shades and tints rather than resolute colours make the picture of life and where the dilemmas erstwhile heart-rending for the ascetic and the Calvinist are entrusted to benignant forces which the church-goer still calls Providence, the scientist Evolution, and the man in the street, more simply, good manners. This change is a valuable progress; it broadens the intellect and makes it more subtly perceptive; it also smooths the feelings and subdues hatred. But the price for it is the loss of contact with radical evil and the inadequacy of self-protection if the hour of a supreme challenge strikes.

Uncouthness, however picturesquely appealing, is patent, for minds so trained, in Dostoevsky's contention that no ethical view of life is really possible unless one believes in the real existence of the devil. Half-silent humour, with its meaning of superior forbearance, is the only fit response to the pretension of Russian and other prophets according to whom we shall see, we actually see, the Antichrist in some incarnation or other of contemporary history.

Now, British civilization and the embranchments of it—which we might call Britannistic as the civilizations risen from the Hellenic motherland were called Hellenistic—all these comfortable communities of seasoned culture and temperate brains met suddenly men like Mussolini and Hitler. Their first reaction was simply to deny their existence, like cultivated travellers when told a story of ghosts. Then, as they were forced to touch them with hands, they sped to set themselves, if not the world, at peace by rationalizing the two portents as best they could in conformity with the accepted patterns of reasonable behaviour. Hitler became to them nothing more than the embodiment of the German revolt against the patent wrongs of the Treaty of Versailles outside, as well as against some regrettable culpability of the red and of the Semitic minority inside; Mussolini nothing else than the expression of the needs of an evidently have-not

people, whom their very poverty together with their lack of self-control pushed toward an experiment of strict collective discipline. That this expression sounded ill-mannered and volcanically spurting was easily laid upon the defective Southern education.

British and Britannistic élites had paid due attention to the great continental philosophies, especially German, of the declining eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But they had responded sluggishly, as a rule, to the ambition of a Hegel, whose far-flung dialectics and involved wording were much too trying for their taste, anchored in a moderate factuality. From later developments, like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, they had as a rule kept aloof, preserving their own judgment both from the egotistic vortex of the former and from the megalomaniac fury of the latter. Neither the insistent chant of Schopenhauer's prose nor Nietzsche's Bible-aping verses with their shocking clamour availed to convince their ears, and even Wagnerism in the Anglo-Saxon countries was rather the single-minded adoption of a new musical glory than a moral hysteria.

This backwardness in information or at least in fashions safeguarded them against contagious diseases, but kept them unprovided against a sudden threat that might spring from the diseased nations. To be sure, England had not been without her share in the disintegration of European culture at the close of the nineteenth century; but Kipling himself, for all his pre-Fascist mottoes, like the one averring that "a good stick is a good reason," and for all his pæans to the seven seas, the barrack-room, and the joy of battle, seldom if ever had soared beyond the level of rapturous excursions to philosophic heights whence to plan a wholesale barbarization of society. To be sure, Englishmen and Americans as well had known about d'Annunzio, and English literary decadence had contributed several faggots to his lurid flame; but few if any fancied him to be anything more or less than another and belated Swinburne or Oscar Wilde in Abruzzese folk-garb.

On the whole they were unprepared to realize the philosophical and fanatical backgrounds working behind such individuals as Hitler and Mussolini; much more so, because they had reached long since a sane equipoise in their own national feelings, of which they generally were not otherwise aware than a healthy human is of his bodily organs and functions. What havoc the nationalistic tumour was making of the disturbed organisms in continental Europe, they were far from even imagining, and their natural trend was to translate the oratory of the dictators into ordinary prose instead of meeting them as messengers—however personally inferior—of forces devastatingly supreme, and of treating them as such until the day of their conversion or ruin.

Soon after the start of his dictatorial career Mussolini, as Duce and Premier, had visited in London. There he appeared, as Mr. Guedalla puts it, "with the full panoply of iron mouth and rolling eye," but his "splendid gesture failed to awe more sceptical observers." Asquith asked the Prime Minister what he thought of Mussolini. "A lunatic, said Mr. Bonar Law." It took full fourteen years with manifold disasters from Addis Ababa and Geneva to Spain and to the Moslem uprisings in the British Empire, ere a dignitary of the Church of England, the reverend Dean of Winchester, gathered voice enough in March 1937 to define Mussolini as a "madman." A madman is, probably, a promoted lunatic; but even the charge of madness is not without conveying an implication half of derision and half of mercy, with the hope, however slight, that the public enemy, practically irresponsible for his deeds, may be cured and healed.

Thus it happened that when Mussolini blew his obstreperous preludes to the assault on Ethiopia the English tried hard to concentrate amidst the clangor in an effort at understanding what the man really and sensibly was after. They had of course read his Fascist Manifesto; but also in those pages Mussolini had listened to the inspiration of his teacher Machiavelli, who had fondly inserted in both his comedies, the *Mandragola* and the

*Clizia*, the selfsame nice little verse praising the "voluptuousness of a fraud, carried to its desired and cherished end." Adequately informed of Anglo-Saxon psychology, the disciple knew that it is a rule of English conduct never to doubt the word of anybody until sufficient evidence is supplied of its mendacity. He therefore had inserted in the paragraph next to the last of his dissertation an incidental sentence purporting that "one can think of an Empire, i.e., of a nation directly or indirectly guiding others, without the need of conquering a single square mile of territory." Later on, when inaugurating his dreary villages in the half-drained Pontine marshes, he had proclaimed: This, against destitution and squalor, is the only war we want.

The English liked the sop. They chose to believe that he was not after Empire and war for war's sake, that it was not blood and fire, "idiot's delight," he coveted. He wanted, they believed, diversion and prestige; or, at most, raw materials for Italy to make a living, and untilled soil for colonists to till.

It may be stupefying that the English persisted in such delusions until as late as January 1937, when they, in spite of all they had endured and were enduring, signed still another gentlemen's agreement with Mussolini, thus achieving only the effect of lowering the standards of gentlemanliness to a level their forebears had never dreamed of. It is also perturbing that as late as September 1936, after the Ethiopian and during the Spanish war, a writer like Walter Lippmann, watching the straws in the wind and venturing the prediction that the demonstration in Spain of what a war would really mean should double the determination of those who meant to prevent it, could list among the forces working for peace the dictator of Italy himself, and highly extol him as "a cultivated European man, a realist and no fool." It is, however, more comprehensible that English statesmen and American observers in the first part of 1935 still were vague about the man's final intentions, if so many Italians had been groping so many years for the real substance of Fascism and the real purpose of its leader.

As soon as the English statesmen determined that Mussolini was in quest of raw materials and tillable soil, they tackled the problem in a positive and business-like frame of mind. They wished to be let alone while attending to the heavy task of restoring British prosperity; they also balked at any minor disturbance which might in any way trouble further the German issue, this latter being of course the only one that counted. Besides, their shift to liberalism and toleration in imperial policy seemed too recent for them to assume a sermonizing attitude toward a forgotten nation of have-nots, and the Boer wound had not thoroughly scarred on their consciences. Another among the unwritten laws of highly civilized societies punctures moralistic lecturing as a mark of bad taste, or perhaps as a veneer on the lecturer's stains. Self-restraint and a subdued language had weaned the English from self-complacency and vainglory; in the twentieth century they did not like any more to say or think that their wealth and power were rewards due to valour and toil. When affronted by somebody of a have-not nation, who flung their fortune in their face as if they merely had hit on the right number in a lottery or inherited a robber's estate, their ordinary reaction was not to retort, but to blush faintly while buttoning their coats.

They sent to the fox's lair in Rome Captain Anthony Eden, their "youthful" secretary of League affairs and ambassador at large. He had been a warrior on the Western front; both his personal experience of battle, considerably more genuine than Mussolini's, and his belief in human progress entitled him to loathe war and to regard it obviously as "an anachronism." Perhaps he also felt entitled to surmise that any other reasonable person's stand should be the same and that nothing short of reasonableness and realism could have carried Mussolini so high as to make of him the ruler of a civilized nation. Eden's proposals in behalf of England were unusually generous, and meant to set an example for future unselfishness in international policy. It was England this time who volunteered to pay the price of

peace, presenting the Ethiopian emperor with British territories on the Red Sea and thus compensating him at her own expense for the concessions through which he should, on the advice of the Western diplomacies, purchase peace from Italy. Comforted by his and his nation's good will and power and by the accepted knowledge that an unshakable traditional friendship tied Italy to England, he approached the Duce on a lovely spring day. The effect was stunning. It is not recorded whether or not the Duce used again his metaphor of the silver salver; sure is it that had he given in and discussed the bargain, his wrecking plan would have been wrecked. Any olive branch was a thorn in his eye; and he visioned the moment as final and leaving no respite for further counterfeit and "voluptuous fraud." His rejection of the proposal was flat, nay, brutal. Seldom before, if ever, had a British aristocrat and diplomat been treated so rudely.

Rumour has it that Captain Eden, while swinging his malacca cane in a comprehensible mood on a Roman sidewalk, conceived and later confided to friends the fiery purpose: "I'll get the skin of that fellow." Not so much because less than a year later he was apparently to dismiss any such purpose, as on account of the contrast between its wording and Captain Eden's Oxford English, it is probable that this anecdote belongs to fictional history. Quite historical, on the contrary, is it that, when Mussolini was asked his impression of the youthful messenger, he concisely answered: "I never saw a better-dressed fool."

But in spite of brag and obloquy he was far from feeling comfortable and from knowing exactly when and how the fox in him might turn to lion. England, however yawningly, roared, and the machinery of the League of Nations was set in motion. Laval's gloved hand managed as best it could to sabotage it, and did some nice work, but far below the task of stopping it altogether. Meanwhile a gigantic ballot of the British electorate about the problems involved in the League of Nations and in the world organization of peace revealed an almost unsuspected Britain, anxious to fight for the League and to have it fight for

herself. It seemed as if this straw poll were determining the spell under which the real poll for the new House of Commons was to be taken not many months later.

Mussolini appeared on his balcony above his cheering but not cheerful crowds, reassuring them, waving a gesture of confident expectation, notifying them that if he did not march ahead at the desirable speed this was only to eschew the risk of marching back. With the help of Laval—and of the League itself, tethered in its clumsy procedures—he kept sidestepping the League, without thinking at all of boldly and openly quitting it in the wake of Germany and Japan. He furthered the military preparation all spring and summer, as long as the rainy season in Ethiopia and the mixed forecast in his own mind made the delay imperative and opportune. At the same time he watched closely the threat of League sanctions, economic and military.

General de Bono, the commander-in-chief overseas, published a year later in a book of memoirs prefaced by Mussolini himself, several of Mussolini's instructions. They are uncommonly instructive. On May 18 the Duce wrote to the general: "You must provide food and ammunition for at least three years, and—absurd though it seems on account of the existing formal agreements about the passage of the Suez Canal in peace and war—we must foresee difficulties of passage. . . . In the House of Commons," he insisted, "they have even talked of closing the canal. One must always be prepared for the gloomiest and hardest contingencies." These words supply fair evidence that he did not harbour any thought of attacking England should she have locked the canal; at any rate the evidence is conclusive that he did not hope to force it. How he and General de Bono would have managed to keep warring in Ethiopia for "at least three years" regardless of the closed canal and of a world-wide boycott, the singular document does not disclose. The smooth omissions in the general's prose—illustrated by subsequent reports—warrant the opinion that the swaggering order was not heeded, nor had it been imparted, literally, and that the depots in Eritrea



and Somaliland never reached the fabulous three-year magnitude. Likely is it that what he had in mind, should the gloomiest and hardest contingencies materialize, was to pin the expeditionary forces to defensive positions against a supposed Ethiopian onslaught, as long as they would remain marooned in Africa beyond the strangled canal. Still more likely is it that he had not yet anything in mind, and was merely groping in the darkness of fear and desire.

He gambled on, banking on France and Fortune. When the League assembled in September, Laval sneaked into its formal unanimity an adulterous speech extending France's fidelity both to the League and to the aggressor. Summer meanwhile declined, and the approaching dry season—fit for man-hunt in Africa—was pressing Mussolini more and more against the wall of his immovably set date, the end of 1935. It seemed as though, at least for a time, nothing would come out of Geneva's sky except wet lightnings in a barrage of inoffensive thunders. He easily outdid the noise. At the beginning of October, the last moment available before the imminent anniversary of the March on Rome—a celebration which he could not possibly have attended empty-handed this time—he summoned his forty million herd to the squares and market-places of all towns and villages. Thither they marched, thousands of simultaneous flocks under one invisible rod, amidst the belching of megaphones, the banging of brass bands, the ringing of church bells swung by sacrilegious ministers of Christ: doubtless the largest scale tom-tomming performance recorded in ages; and there they submitted to the invisible's voice urging them, the helpless helots, to carry civilization into Ethiopia. On October 3 the die was cast. It was a date supreme to him. For ten years, after having stamped down all lawfulness in his own country, he had crawled around the ramparts of international law searching in vain for an inviting breach. Now he stood up, defying openly all guardians and tearing in their faces a file of pledges and treaties. For a day or more he could think of himself as of the one embodying Nietzsche's ideal

man, that worshipful compound of "Egoism, Cruelty, Treachery, Craftiness, and Destruction," and the anarchist's libido was at last allowed free course.

Mareb was the name of the African Rubicon running between the old Italian colony and the Ethiopian Empire. It was crossed on the same day. General de Bono had solicited Mussolini for instructions whether or not a declaration of war should be issued, and, if in the affirmative, of what kind. The laconic answer from Rome spelt: "No declaration of war." This was essential to Mussolini, not verily in order that a diplomatic gap might be left for an emergency retreat, but much rather because the omission of the formality proudly implied a corollary of his anarchical creed. As the laws of marriage, the communion of meals, the rites of burials, had raised, since civilization's dawn, the nude facts of sex, of food, of death, to some kind of spiritual beauty, or as the majesty of the tribunals had overlaid with at least a semblance of piety even the injustice of privilege, even the fierceness of revenge, an analogous set of rules had been immemorially worked out to ennoble in loyalty and chivalry the horror of fratricidal carnage. Among such rules the declaration of war had been primary; the half-gods, half-beasts of the Homeric world had usually complied with it; and transgressions like tribal *razzias* or the sinking of Russian battleships by Japan before the inception of formal warfare in 1904 had been condemned throughout as brutishness. But this precisely was the reason why the Duce of Fascism—encouraged perhaps by the example of Japan, again, in Manchuria—wished a new deal, exemplary for the future. A declaration of war conveys the meaning that war is the exception and peace the rule, war evil and peace good. If war is, as it is, the seed and flower of all things, then peace, if anything, ought to be declared, not war—which is self-declaring for ever.

The ideological gibe at democratic ideology was immediately thereupon perfected by General de Bono himself, in a lighter and witty vein. As he entered, caracoling behind his army, the northernmost province of the empire, he had pasted on its walls

of mud and trash his placards notifying the natives that "wherever the flag of Italy is hoisted, there is liberty."

But there was as yet no war. As often happens, desire, made dizzy by its own congestion, still missed accomplishment. The Ethiopians either quietly surrendered or enigmatically withdrew. Aduwa, Adigrat, finally Makalle—bleak places or void names hallowed forty years earlier by handfuls of Italians who fought and died in honourable defeats, one against ten, atoning for the cruel idiocy of their government—were now taken for the asking, practically without one shot. The memoirs of the conqueror in chief, Emilio de Bono, close with the half-witted words: "Of important engagements we had none; much less of anything that might be called a battle. Unfortunately so! It is not we, however, who avoided the enemy. . . . Had he chosen to be overtaken or to face us, we would have won. . . ."

Whether or not, under that guidance, they would have won, nobody knows. The killing of a nation, though the feeblest on earth, seemed a less sleek affair for such a warrior than had been the suppression of a Socialist deputy eleven years earlier. Already the lines of the invading army looked too loosely and widely stretched, inviting from the mystery of the enemy's absence some outflanking onrush; already were the commander's telegrams and slumbers none too calm. He was soon to be relieved, and promoted to marshal at home. "The ride to Makalle," wrote he, inimitably, in his memoirs, "had been my swan song."

But while imperial glory lagged and military peril loomed far away, cumuli portending a real storm and scaring off the half-confident mood of the eve in September had been gathering at a breath-taking tempo on the near horizon. The League lived, the League acted; over fifty nations, an unheard-of synod of mankind, united around the leadership of Britain; crippling activities of such "fixers" as France's Laval and Switzerland's Motta were being crippled in turn; threat followed threat and facts sprouted from words; sanctions were voted overwhelm-

ingly. They were, to be sure, still of a sort more apt to impoverish further the rather guiltless and rather penniless Italian populace than to cut the nerve of war in the hand of the ruling culprit. Their immediate effect could consequently be twisted to the culprit's advantage; and twisted it was, by means of a frantic propaganda maddening the mob against perfidious Albion and welding an extemporaneous solidarity in the Italian prison between inmates and jailer. But he did not fool himself about the lapsable quality of that froth or about the outcome, should the first short steps of the League quicken to wider strides. Topping all other omens, the British electoral campaign, now in full swing, exhibited rightists and leftists vying with each other in the unqualified endorsement of the world covenant, and wooing the constituencies under the passwords of the Genevan and Ethiopian issues. It seemed as though the moral forces, scorned by Fascism and Machiavellism as mere phantoms, were donning flesh and armour; and terror gripped the man.

These weeks in the early autumn of 1935, an Antichrist's Calvary, were the worst so far in his career, next to the weeks in the summer of 1924 immediately after the Matteotti murder. The high walls sheltering his seclusion did not prevent each and all from having a glimpse of his plight, and sensitive women visitors, like Mrs. O'Hare McCormick, found him ageing. Few intimates were admitted to try to shore up his courage; most persistent of all his juvenile son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, chubby, florid. He had served as a consul general in China. "Don't you worry," he would say to the father-in-law, relaxedly, "I know the English. I've been in Shanghai. They won't do a thing." But confidence, as entertained in the family group, was not enough to offset the patent jeopardy.

He mastered fairly well his words, if not his mien, and pondered secretly the escapes. What his inmost plan looked like in those nerve-racking weeks everybody was none the less enabled to visualize a year later in documentary and italicized pages of de Bono's Duce-prefaced book. That such holy writs could be re-

leased by Mussolini for public use may seem a riddle to those who never saw a successful gambler show off his worthless set of cards while raking in the stake, and triumph in bluff and luck. The boast, however, was in this case so gross—and fraught perhaps with dubiety of effects—that he changed his mind, as he had with Ludwig's *Talks*, which after the first edition had been conveniently expurgated. This time too, after a brief self-indulgence, he trimmed the third edition of the marshal's volume; and sundry documents were restored to their virginity, though damaged, in the files.

As early as August—no more definite date being given—in the imminence of the League meeting, he had written to de Bono: "This is my last letter you receive before the action. I think that after September 10 you must expect my order any moment. . . . The forces at your disposal are sufficient for the first dash and the attainment of the established goals. On the conquered line you will stop, organizing the rear and waiting for the events on the international level." Obviously, it was in view of the international level that the first dash was postponed for approximately another twenty days. Then, the march of time forbade any further delay. He cabled, however, to de Bono on October 17: "You must strengthen the defensive apparatus on the Adigrat-Aksum-Aduwa line extending to the right. My orders will reach you when the European situation is made clear from the point of view of sanctions and above all of the British-Italian relations . . ." A set of dots cuts the general's quotation at this highly intriguing moment.

In the meantime Badoglio, the head of the General Staff, had been sent to Africa, not yet to replace de Bono, but to inspect the lines. He was accompanied by Lessona, the Secretary of Colonial Affairs. The three sat in council. "In our reunions," writes de Bono, "we also discussed what might have happened to the colony in view of the sanctions which we knew were to be applied; although it was not yet known to what extent. Consequently we decided on the eighteenth [October] to cable to the

Duce:—Here together with His Excellency Badoglio and His Excellency Lessona we have concordantly decided: First: Given the defensive attitude that we must now take, it is opportune and necessary to suspend the sailing of the two divisions of Black-shirts. Second: The accelerated afflux of troops in these last two months has necessarily slowed the landing of provisions and materials. As soon as the landing of the Sila Division is completed . . . the necessary measures will be promptly taken to clear the port of Massawa with the subsequent transportation to the high plateau of the provisions, ammunitions, and materials lying at the base of Massawa. Third: By rationing both populace and troops, and taking into account that meat and salt abound on place, we suppose that provisions may last about six months. Shipments of oil are still desirable. We are short of it in spite of recent shipments. We have a supply for two months, except the aviation, which has been all the time provided directly by its Ministry." Apart from the astonishing confession of incompetent and contradictory organization, this page makes memorably evident that the three years' supplies, amassed in May by Mussolini's imaginative power, had dwindled in October to six months of rationed food and two months of fuel.

On the following twentieth Mussolini cabled back. A set of dots, much longer, mutilates the message this time at its very beginning. Then the quotation follows. "No complication will arise in Europe before the British elections, which are set for the middle of November. Well, at that date all Tigray [the northernmost province of Ethiopia] as far as Makalle and farther must be ours. . . . I also have the duty of reminding you that with the end of the embargo modern weapons and ammunition are arriving in great quantities in Ethiopia, so that time is working against us, and on the other hand a too long delayed occupation of Makalle can embolden our enemies and make hesitant our friends." Almost whiningly the commander answered, entreating the Duce to realize that "each step forward entailed a consumption of tons of oil more." However, a little later he

braced himself to promise a march on Makalle for November 10. "See," adjured the Duce on the twenty-fifth, "if it is feasible for you to anticipate to the fifth what you had planned for the tenth." The subsequent dispatches of the harassed commander are all one moan about the known predicaments, to which he now added the shortage of drinking water. He had mules but he was in dire want of saddles and muleteers. His hair—had he not enjoyed the benefit of baldness—would have stood on end at the thought of feeding an advancing army on the resources of a colony, "where there is nothing, absolutely nothing except cattle": or "live meat," as he inimitably expressed himself, omitting this time the salt. Nevertheless he pledged himself to the date November 5, "or 6," as he ventured, bargaining, the poor man, for a twenty-four-hour reprieve. Mussolini stiffened. He cut the interval, and set the military clock two days ahead while disclosing to the tormented friend, in a general way, the reason for the hurry. "To synchronize the political with the military exigencies I order you to resume action with objective Makalle-Takkaze on the morning of November 3. . . . Answer required." The injunction was cabled on October 29. The general sighed back: November 3 all right.—But shortly thereafter on the same day he confided to the Duce his inkling that what the political necessity might imperatively exact was the prompt occupation of Makalle and nothing more. He designed accordingly to reach Makalle while going warily with the other sections of the army and of the front; and asked for the Duce's approval. It came.

The piteous village clustering around a rotting castle was captured at top speed on November 8 amid the genuine jubilation of the inhabitants and the obdurate absenteeism of the enemy. Running contests of the Italian newcomers with the trained Askaris of the colonial corps had enlivened the march. "Makalle," writes de Bono, "is a very poor thing, as are all localities in Tigrai. . . . I am unable to judge whether the conquest, accomplished without a shot, could have worked as a strongly positive coefficient in the evaluation which the other Powers of Eu-

rope were making of our enterprise. . . . What is sure is that our position, from the points of view of services and strategy, had become worse." On the eleventh the Duce ordered: "March straightway on Amba Alagi with the native divisions while the national divisions will stop at Makalle-Scelicot. Answer required." Amba Alagi was the southernmost cliff in Tigray, where forty-one years earlier the outmost and thinnest Italian van had been engulfed in the surge of Negus Menelek's advancing hordes. De Bono answered: "My explicit opinion is that it is a mistake to march now on Amba Alagi, even if only with natives. . . . Mark well that, apart from the dolorous historical reminiscence which I suppose does not need any revindication, Amba Alagi has no strategic meaning at all and is tactically defective, susceptible as it is to being outflanked from any side. . . . I believe that at this moment the military situation must prevail over all other considerations." This really was his swan song. The Duce acknowledged his cable, agreeing on the validity of his reasons, and thereupon, on the following seventeenth, cabled him the decision of giving him a successor in Badoglio. The latter landed in Africa on November 26 but did not conquer Amba Alagi before February 28, 1936, when probably even poor de Bono himself would have been good enough.

To be sure, the documents published by de Bono provide but a spare selection even of those alone which he personally knew; nor were they revealed by him in their integrity. Such as they are—and deprived at that of the additional information that might come from unwritten talks with the Duce, the reports of which he constantly withheld—those documents afford anyhow a commanding evidence of what the plan of Mussolini was for the best of cases. He realized obviously that the crucial moment would come after the British elections in November. The conquest of Tigray from Aduwa to Amba Alagi, if feasible and maintainable, could serve two purposes: glittering as Fascist glory in the eyes of those Italians whose inferiority complex about the "liberalistic shame" of 1896 Fascism had carefully



nursed, and playing the role of a bird in the hand in hoped-for and face-saving negotiations with England and the League for a way out.

For the worst of cases he could have no plan. Should the League have refused any reward, however trifling, to the aggressor, he would have been forced to quit even Tigrai, from Makalle to Aduwa. The documentary evidence plainly discloses what the supplies, especially of fuel, looked like. An oil embargo, without the supplement of any other hostile measure, would have brought to collapse the Ethiopian adventure, in a few weeks or days, and along with it Fascism itself.

Already no fewer Italians than Ethiopians gasped in the expectation of deliverance that should come from England and the League. They thronged around the news-stands or leaned over the shoulders of foreign travellers in trollies and railway cars to catch a glimpse of the precious foreign paper. Already the smaller nations in Europe allowed their fear-haunted breasts to breathe in prospective security, and more than a flutter of doubt ran over the Nazi press portending the return of Germany to the fold of the powerful League.

Why did England default, bringing the League, not Fascism, to its knees? Why was the unique opportunity of inaugurating a world of law and order forfeited irreparably?

## *March on Geneva*

THE secret of that moment—the most decisive in modern history since the tragic peace treaties of 1919—hides partly in archives which may surrender eventually what at present they hide. But most of it lies buried deep in the bosoms of British statesmen who will never uncover it; much more so as they themselves honestly do not know very precisely what was the working of their inner selves. A differentiated and highly subtilized education implies a warning against the perilous intricacies of introspection; and it is the way of mature aristocracies to keep the motives of their actions at safe distance behind the screen of conventional morals.

The official version, untiringly reiterated in the following months, claims that the threat of Mussolini's war against England was unmistakably impending, and that England felt neither fully prepared to win it nor wholly assured of France's single-hearted support, nor, finally, eager to plunge another generation into bloodshed and horror, if they could only be avoided. For these considerations British pride stooped to compromise. At the close of the crisis in June 1936 Stanley Baldwin produced a speech, modestly glorying in the merit of having averted a war.

If that were so, justifications would not be lacking, and not from the angle alone of those who, fighters or civilians, would have been predestined as holocausts to the Fascist wrath. Nobody can serve God and Moloch at once; and when a community like the British has reached a level of intelligence from the height of which it utterly disapproves war, one cannot expect

it to exult in the thrill of an imminent slaughter. What the mind condemns the heart must hate; and the Mussolinian and Hitlerite cult of war could not enlist many proselytes in a civilized country.

Pacifism, and absolute pacifism, had gone to all lengths in British and Britannistic communities, especially with several of their intellectual exponents. It was during the crisis of Ethiopia and the League that a noted British archæologist and historian, Stanley Casson, suggested to Britain that she should recede into her marine shell, forgetting about the continent and following the example of antique Byzantium, which—alleged he—forgot about the outer barbarized world and thus preserved in itself the seeds for another human age to come. It was also during the Ethiopian crisis that Aldous Huxley, now engaging in missionary propaganda, gave out an inspired syllabus of "constructive peace." The tract, red and gold, was priced threepence and meant for wide evangelizing circulation. "To sign a pledge refusing to take any part in another war," said Huxley, "is commendable. But it is not enough." It is not yet constructive peace. "In a vague way practically everyone is now a pacifist." If Fascists and Nazis talk differently, this happens merely owing to the difficulties of their have-not nations. Should they be helped out of their economic predicaments, Fascists and Nazis would prove as good Constructive Pacifists as Aldous Huxley himself. There, however, lies the danger. Take, for instance, the Ethiopian issue. "Either sanctions must be intensified, in which case it is probable that Italy will, in desperation, precipitate a European war; or else Abyssinia must be sacrificed." Obviously, the way out is the calling, immediately, of a world conference "for the permanent settling of the justifiable claims, not only of Italy, but of all the other dissatisfied powers." The conference should come to agreements: first, as to the supply of tropical raw materials; second, on monetary policy; third, with regard to industrial production and markets; fourth, on tariffs; fifth and last, on migration. This is all that should be done about "the

case for constructive peace," and the attitude of Britain is evidently decisive. "One generous gesture on the part of a great nation might be enough to set the whole world free."<sup>1</sup>

If Huxley shared the wealth and disposed of the British Empire, endorsing at its face value the Fascist charge against the League of Nations as a syndicate of monopolistic nations, Bertrand Russell was to go a step further, disposing of England herself. Should the worst come to the worst, said he a year later, Hitler and his troops invading Great Britain ought to be welcomed like tourists and greeted in a friendly way. "Whatever damage the Germans could do to us would not be worse than the damage done in fighting them, even if we won. The Nazis would find some interest in our way of living, I think, and the starch would be taken out of them."

It is highly gratifying that these remarkable personalities enjoy a larger credit in the world of archæology, of creative imagination, and of mathematics, than in politics proper. Were the opposite true, then nothing more gratifying might happen to Mussolini and Hitler.

But, at a more sensible level, there is no denying the circumstantial soundness of the view holding that a fancied peril of the future—which men or gods may ultimately avert—is preferable to a real and imminent disaster, and that it is the duty of a civilized community to shun, not to invite, war. The idea of accepting at all costs the challenge of Mussolini, and of unchaining the demon of destruction in order to make the world safe for everlasting peace, bore the well-known marks of murderous delusion. If Mussolini really entertained the purpose of attacking England and the League, and had the means thereto, a sort of bitter wisdom could be seen in England's sitting down to eat humble pie while visioning and procuring not so distant chances for a more honourable meal. Even the idea of winning that particular war—if victory had been certain—was all but

<sup>1</sup> Aldous Huxley, *What Are You Going to Do about It?*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1935.

cheering. Italy was behind, or under, Fascism; a land, almost holy, to which so many English had gone as pilgrims of intellectual beauty and love. Much as they might be trained in tuning down the sentimental chords of their inner selves, the pursuit of Italy as a public enemy, the ruthless hitting back at it with the support of practically all the world, the shelling and setting afire of Rome and Florence, even if it should happen the day after a Fascist incursion on London, could not be anticipated without a shudder akin to the horror of matricide.

Unfortunately for the official and sentimental version, it was entitled to legitimate currency only among men in the street and candid dreamers. Those in the higher places, its authors, knew how different from truth it was. Mussolini had neither the will nor the power to wage war.

Indeed, if one believed in the much talked of decadence of the English nation, one might also believe that its psychological intelligence, usually so keen especially when brisked by humour, had slackened to the point of taking Mussolini's threats in their literal rather than in their literary import. His career, from the riots in Romagna to the March on Rome, from the march on Corfu to the Matteotti affair and further, revealed a trait of his nature almost as unchangeable as fingerprints: the attitude, namely, of attacking an enemy only when the attacker was safe and his advantage overwhelming. Seldom, if ever, has a man changed his nature on the threshold of old age. That such suggestions emanating from Mussolini's personality and biography could elude the insight of the British rulers is, however, theoretically credible: perhaps on the basis of the rule preventing a gentleman from doubting the word of another gentleman, until the latter is proved to be a liar.

But less credible than a slip in the psychological intelligence of the rulers would be the bankruptcy of the Intelligence Service at the disposal of the Foreign Office. The achievements of these gentlemen even in recent years had been so striking as to discredit the assumption that they could be totally unaware of

the Duce's fears and of the dramatic exchange of queries and instructions between de Bono and him. The same is valid of the Admiralty. It does not seem plainly plausible that they took seriously the invention, fathered on Marconi, of an electrical device deadening from afar all motors on land, on sea, and in the sky; nor the legion of Mussolinian flying bombers who, like irate although sacrificial archangels, were allegedly ready to plunge themselves and the British battleships into simultaneous doom, staging a Wagnerian finale in flame and flood.

Another step further down on the ladder of decreasing credibility will be the final one. It is utterly incredible that England did not know about the Fascist shortage of fuel. But this precisely, the oil embargo, is the weapon which she immovably refused to unsheathe, untiringly putting off the date of its use whenever a talk about its use became audible again. Her rulers, shrinking from nothing in order to flinch from a conclusive resolve, went so far as to blame American neutrality for the impracticability of the embargo: a flagrant untruth in face of the American good will, operatively manifest in considerable advance of the hour of decision. Clearly enough, the British abstinence was inspired by the knowledge that that one weapon would have been decisive.

Its effect was easily imaginable. Mussolini had said: "Sanctions mean war." Sanctions, however heavy on the Italian sheep and slight on the Fascist wolves, had been voted and applied. No war had flared. Then a news flash ran round the world: the British Home Fleet was going to concentrate in the Mediterranean; its vanguard of giants was headed for Gibraltar. A Roman daily close to the Duce's podium, the shrillest clarinet in the Duce-conducted orchestra of the Fascist press, blared a piercing solo: If the Home Fleet concentrates in the Mediterranean, it will get our answer; nay, it will meet our answer before concentrating. The Home Fleet steamed on schedule; its smoke, phantasmal off the Gulf of Naples, beclouded the country with terror, or expectation; no bombing archangels dived from

heaven. Now the slogan was modified: "Oil embargo means war." Had the embargo been voted and enforced, with the military depots gaping, even a desperate gesture would have been beyond the character and the power of the Duce. Had he changed his nature and chosen Samson's end, he would have hardly had hands to shake the columns. The Monarchy, the Church, the General Staff, the Admiralty, Big Business, all flowing mantles on the tyrant's shoulders as long as Fortune cared for him, would have tightened to straitjackets. All the occult forces of Italy, confronted with the imminence of disaster and revolution, would have rushed to stop the madman. But official England chose to believe that oil embargo meant war. She kept her own and the League's guns levelled at Mussolini, while duly notifying him that they were not loaded.

The contention of the leftists, contrasting the official and pacifist version, purports that the British Government had already committed itself to Mussolini since the primal conception of his plan, at the close of 1934: keeping in mind sundry purposes, most inspiring of which was the scheme to bribe the Duce with his forty million Italian slaves into a Locarno or a Stresa front where they might help bridle the insolence of Germany and provide England with further opportunities for her traditional continental game. Subsequently, these interpreters aver, the British rulers were overtaken by the peace ballot of the British electorate. Unusual cleverness was required to out-ride the unexpected disturbance. They staged the comedy of League and sanctions, a vicious trick. When the November elections were over and they felt firm in the saddle, they reverted to the pre-established course. Into the bargain, they magnified Mussolini's war threat and belittled Britain's preparedness to withstand it, thus frightening the taxpayer into a monstrous expenditure in armaments, allegedly necessary to national and imperial security and factually profitable to big industry and the City.

Apart from several chronological incongruities, this version appears no less one-sided and inadequate than the government's

story. Its only superiority consists in the guileless honesty, nay, naïveté of its proponents. Had the English rulers planned such a devilish plot, they would have easily managed to actuate it more astutely than they did; in their inherited political skill they had learned the use of subtler tools. The correspondence between Mussolini and de Bono proves superabundantly that in the autumn of 1935 the Duce was diametrically far from feeling sure about the commitments and complicity of England. And the defacing black-eyes and bruises with which the English prestige came out of the diplomatic fight supply a conclusive, however redundant, evidence that the fight had not been meant as entirely a farce.

No single and clear-cut motive can be supposed as standing behind a muddled action; and the springs of English action or inaction were as twisted and contradictory as its results were to be confusing. Doubtless, intransigence against Mussolini would have brought about, without any war, the early collapse of Fascism and an overpowering victory of the League. At least the latter result seemed obviously desirable to nearly every Englishman in the street. More penetrating minds, however, realized, even if perhaps subconsciously, that a victory of the League would have been tantamount to the birth of a more than Wilsonian organization of the world, with laws and strength to enforce them: a League with teeth in it. This meant a Superstate, and the creation of a Superstate entails a loss of sovereignty, or freedom, for the single states. Was this by-product of the victory equally desirable for all the English people and its ruling class? Besides all other consequences, it implied a profound transformation in the existing order, or disorder, with an ordeal, perhaps unbearable, for conservatism: which is a mild paralysis of the mind as systematic revolutionism is a compulsion neurosis.

When a real League of Nations is born, it must of necessity be endowed with rules intelligible to everybody and applicable any time and anywhere. This means that a supernational



legislation must unavoidably be conceived in a spirit universal and organic, similar to that of the Roman Law. But this is a spirit which the Anglo-Saxon mentality still dislikes, clinging instead to the unpredictable suppleness and inventive adaptations of the common and even unwritten law. It is generally admitted that if England before August 1914 had formally pledged herself to fight for France in certain given cases, the World War might have been avoided; and most thinking people, on both sides of the Atlantic, agree today that a joint Anglo-American declaration specifying the circumstances under which the two nations would jointly recur to arms would magically appease all stormy waters all over the planet. Yet they did it not, and do it not: such is the cleft between the advice of reason and interest and the inhibition of the mental patterns. No price in gold or blood is too high for them, if only they are allowed to preserve their freedom of initiative in the future, often a nominal freedom, from what they call commitments or entanglements. Of commitments and entanglements there would obviously have been a great deal more in a real League of Nations than in any particular alliance; even granted that a written word conveys for them a far more serious meaning than it does for the Machiavellian brood.

Moreover, a conference of the kind proposed by Aldous Huxley and so many others should have been called. The League of Nations would have been the conference. The argument about the meagreness or nothingness of economic opportunities in the overseas empires works both ways. If the have-nots are wrong in yearning after those chimeras, the haves are equally wrong, or more, holding them fast. The way out would be to bury the hatchets, merging in a pool or world-consortium whatever raw materials or facilities for immigrating labour may be available in colonial territories. But this again would have entailed a loss, if not in real goods, in prestige and rank, and a break in the continuity of habits. As the hoped-for victory of the League grew exceedingly in the significance of its expectable

aftermath, these and similar sources of half-confessed concern watered the liquor of enthusiasm in many British glasses.

Other forces were at work in more secluded recesses behind the scene. There were dynastic interests, with the King of Belgium, brother-in-law of the unlucky Italian crown prince, as a go-between across the Channel. Inside the Foreign Office a certain number of Roman Catholics filled commanding or influential places; their religious inspiration drove them of necessity to will and to do what might least displease the Holy Father and consequently his protégé, the Fascist Man of Providence. In the Church of England itself, or in those sections of it that had nursed long since a feeling of Prodigal Sons toward the Roman Father, many hearts were split alike between Geneva and Rome.

Whether, in the economic field, the pro-Fascist propensities of the propertied classes were a primary spring of conduct or an ultimate straw on the camel's back, is not very relevant. They weighed, relevantly. The extortionary challenge of Fascist propaganda: "Either black or red, either Fascism or Communism," had not been resisted by many: such had been the screaming. And, when once that dilemma has been accepted, the alinement of individuals and classes follows along the tracks of Marxian fatalism: the owners clustering around the black banner and the others flocking to the red fold. The English leading classes tried hard to keep the middle way; this was a luxury they firmly hoped their country could afford as long as all the world did not go red. But they did not trust Italy. Their government made circumspect inquiries there as to the group or party that could be expected to come to power on Mussolini's downfall. The result of the inquiries was apparently unsatisfactory. If that was so, they preferred the risks of a future world deluge which God might avert, to the certainty of some imminent tremor under their club arm-chairs which happened to be in the seismic area of an Italian upheaval. They could not afford a revolution in Italy. That country was too near.

Thus, all wandering through the maze of motives leads back to the point of departure. England defaulted because she could not afford to believe in the existence of anything like radical evil. An insistent education in the subtleties of understanding and ironical intelligence had deprived her best men of the intelligence of the tragic. When they were at this crossroads of history, faced with a final issue, they chose to think that it was not final at all and listened again to the teaching of one of their representative men, Samuel Butler's man, whose only fear was "lest he should again feel strongly upon any subject." They did not want to feel strongly upon Fascism, and they handled it as one, whatever the smell, among the many ingredients which are usable in the political cuisine.

Naturally it is disbelief in evil which either makes lukewarm the servant of good or consigns him to the doom of a blind fight. Whether it is the noble savage Othello who, much less than Professor Kittredge, would have been able to conceive the gratuitous iniquity of Iago, or the over-cultured Hamlet stumbling on intellectual cavils, the issue is the same: catastrophe for themselves and those in the sphere of their action. Shakespeare, at the end of 1935, was more than ever a national poet of England; and Baldwin, Hoare, Eden, and all the rest appear as an aggregation of incarnate Hamlets.

The fifth act of the tragedy opened early in December. Suddenly the Hoare-Laval plan was announced. Sir Samuel Hoare had succeeded as Secretary of Foreign Affairs to Sir John Simon, an understanding friend of Mussolini. Now he had taken up the lead from his predecessor as well as from his Premier and chief. Laval had pulled the strings he had in hand, and supplied perhaps the larger part of the inspiration. The French governmental press went so far as to intimate that the plan was not definitive and could still be improved: in behalf, of course, of Mussolini.

The plan was not the face-saving escape Mussolini had hoped for; it was no negotiation of compromise pivoting around Aduwa and Makalle. Astonishingly, as though to finish the nuisance

once for all and to exceed all Fascist desire with the lavishness of the gift, the plan handed over to Mussolini a huge share of Ethiopian territory, the best part of it, with a sweeping political and economic control over what was left to the Negus on a derisive map. It was Ethiopia on the silver salver, a dazzling reward to the aggressor. Blood and fire alone, the trimmings of military glory, were absent from the offering.

Popular and parliamentary indignation forced the British Government to withdraw it. Mussolini, shrewdly indeed, had taken his time. At the eleventh hour, when he felt sure that he ran no risk by slighting a gift which the Powers were cancelling, he bluntly rejected it. Hoare resigned.

But now, whatever might happen, the authority of England and the prestige of the League with it, were gone. The road lay open for the march on Addis Ababa.

## *March on Addis Ababa*

IT WAS spectacular.

In less than five months the oldest Empire on earth was wiped out, the emperor in miserable flight, the capital burning. Visioned in a diorama compounding the magnitude of the land with the tempo of the onrush, the conquest of Ethiopia might rank with Alexander the Great's subjugation of Persia or with Hernán Cortés's climb to Tenochtitlán.

But there was no glory. As Mussolini's statesman's palm had been much rather plucked from his opponents' complacency and complicity than wrung from any vanquished resistance of Lon-

don and Geneva, so were Badoglio's feats—military corollaries of the diplomatic prank—ninety percent the effect of Ethiopian helplessness or outright absence.

To the credit of Mussolini remains the steadfastness of his Machiavellian belief in the contemptibility of human nature. This faith, which never deserted him altogether, enabled him even through the weeks of acutest worry to play for time and to wait for his opponents' complicity and complacency. At another level credit must be given to the Duce's field marshal for his organizing expertness. A careful reader of maps, versed in all kinds of military discipline, a veteran of the World War in many events of which, from Caporetto to the armistice, he had played important roles, a head of the General Staff for many years, he met all the requirements for the tasks of lopping hanging salients, of covering flanks against enveloping attacks, of having food and ammunition conveyed where they were needed.

At first he was thoughtful and slow, as his superannuated predecessor had wanted to be. The hazy menace of an Ethiopian thrust into the loosely connected lines of the invading army seemed time and again on the eve of materializing. If unofficial reports are correct, the Negus's vanguard even succeeded in recapturing, for a moment or two, the position of Makalle. Badoglio stood on guard, his sobered professional skill not unmindful of the lesson he had learned some twenty years earlier in a north-eastern Alpine trap.

An incident in January, eagerly welcomed, flung open the gates of the Empire. Tito Minniti, an Italian aviator compelled by engine trouble to alight within the enemy lines, appeared to the Ethiopians as if he were about to surrender. Then, when a substantial number of them had thronged around the stranded airplane, he—gallantly, there is no denying—started machine-gunning them at closest range. They beheaded him. Sabre rather than gun was the ordinary weapon of the primitive Abyssinian warrior.

This was the coveted "Abyssinian atrocity." It was megaphoni-

cally declared that the war would be pushed on with *all* means, and that the Abyssinian savagery deserved reprisals. The reprisals were poison gases.

Landing in Mexico "and mustering his forces, Cortés found they amounted to one hundred and ten mariners, five hundred and fifty-three soldiers, including thirty-two crossbow men, and thirteen arquebusiers, besides two hundred Indians of the islands, and a few Indian women for menial offices. He was provided with ten heavy guns, four lighter pieces called falconets, and with a good supply of ammunition. He had, besides, sixteen horses. They were not easily procured, for the difficulty of transporting them across the ocean in the flimsy craft of that day made them rare and incredibly dear in the islands." But the monstrous beasts, never dreamt of by the natives, and the uproarious performance of a sample of artillery played the part known to everybody in the downfall of the empire of Montezuma and Guatemozin.

The Fascist regime had sent to Africa the hugest expeditionary force recorded in history, with the possible exception of the Persian armies in Greece, if the figures ventured by ancient historians are credible. The figures in the present case are no controversial matter. But the numerical advantage of the invaders, totalling over half a million, was the least effective of their superiorities. When the preparations for supplies and sanitation had been completed, they disposed of all the comforts of a *de luxe* warfare, from canned food to mineral water, from large sororities of imported priestesses of Venus to streamlined and air-conditioned hospital ships. Hundreds and thousands of machine-guns, of light and heavy cannon, of armoured cars, of airplanes, cleared earth and sky to their advance. This smashing apparatus of death took over the part which in Cortés's conquest of Mexico had been entrusted to a miniature circus of steeds and firecrackers. The Ethiopians had nothing. "During all the time which I spent in East Africa," wrote de Bono, "I never saw an Ethiopian airplane flying." The statement, favourably impressive

in its candour, might have been countersigned by Badoglio as well.

Nevertheless it is doubtful whether he would have been able to reach Amba Alagi, not to speak of Addis Ababa, if chemistry, legitimated by Minniti's sacrifice and by a "voluptuous fraud" about England's furnishing the Ethiopians with dum-dum bullets, had not supplied the decisive implement to his martial equipment. Both fronts, South and North, in Somaliland and in Tigray, were generously treated with mustard gas, whereupon the waves of other skin-charring, lung-rending exhalations were tidally spanned. Worse even than unprotected by masks or shelters, the Ethiopians were half-naked: their nakedness made more piteous by ignorance, unaware of the danger until the pangs of agony. After one single engagement, called the Battle of Amba Aradam, one single captain, a Milanese, numbered over sixteen thousand "enemies" lying all together in the wake of the invisible vapour. Burying them would have been lengthy business; they were disposed of with flame-throwers, in comprehensive pyres. The captain's estimate, needless to say, was offhand; and it seems likely that his horror-stricken or otherwise magnifying imagination stilted the figure. Certain it is at any rate that time and circumstances did not enable him to number, even if only approximately, how many were burned half-alive.

Panic should have been the consequence in the Ethiopian rank and file. It was not. Reports are popular of the poor savages clenching their fists, swinging their scimitars at the safely hovering airplanes. They challenged the flyers to descend to the ground, to "fight like men." In sacrificial swarms they would rush, uphill, the seemingly impregnable nest of an enemy machine-gun, the last survivors clambering over heaps of dead to clasp the finally silenced rattler. Time and again a halt was bidden, for a moment, to the inevitable. The Negus was already a fugitive at Sassabaneh when Ras Nassibu could still afford to battle victoriously and to avert once more, for one moment, the doom.

Neglect, degradation, feud, greed, had sealed it. In this as in any other happening, the guilt of the aggressor does not exculpate the victim. The worst among the Ethiopian chieftains and dignitaries of the Church, a good number of them, had been bought off with Fascist gold: to which the Italian women, in a procession led by a dummy queen, had brought the contribution, more or less voluntary, of their wedding rings. Gold—along with iron and flame, along with poisoned air and diplomatic collusion—was one of the elements of war; nay, a spearhead; and the advice of Franchetti had not been disregarded altogether. De Bono, with his usual frankness, evaluates at hundreds of thousands the Ethiopian fighters whom gratuities and other favours kept out of the fight, thus lifting further the invaders' numerical upper hand. In spite of all rebuking gestures at the silver salver, it was on a heavily gilded salver that Ethiopia was served to the conqueror in Rome.

The others among the chieftains, the best under the lead of the Negus, had chosen to enter the strife, which they by no means had provoked, in armour of untarnished faith. They acted, or spoke, as if they, illiterates or nearly so, had learned by heart Homer and the other ancient poets praising the unknown Ethiopia of their forebears as the land of piety and innocence, cherished by the gods. In God they trusted; or, more precisely, in international law and the League of Nations, in England and Jesus Christ. Discountable as his attitude might seem in the light of the motives which stood behind it, Haile Selassie, the frail barbarian, was none the less the one among the rulers of the earth who during all those months walked steadfastly on the path of civilization and honour. His words, however, did not help him weave political nets or steel his front. An unarmed prophet, he crumbled.

Most military experts all over the world had anticipated years of struggle. It was one feature of that tragedy of errors that while the Ethiopians relied on the League, the League and England relied on the famed Ethiopian valour and on the Fas-



cist wear and tear in a guerrilla warfare without surcease, in order that a rag of their authority and prestige might be rescued through a mediation of some sort. Badoglio, and Mussolini himself, firmly set though he now was on a totalitarian deal, had planned—if the rumour is true—for at least two campaigns. All forecasts were shattered. All had been unheeding of the frantic tempo at which final developments often are consummated when once destiny has struck.

From the end of February onward the invading armies kept pace with the advance of spring. Over ravines and ridges, in the barren magic of ever-expanding horizons, they scaled the stupendous wilderness. The radiant May saluted them in Addis Ababa on the lofty plateau.

Few were missed. The loss of Italians amounted to 3497, including those dead of sicknesses: a percentage surprisingly below the normal death rate, as if the Ethiopians' iron, both cold and hot, together with the famed miasmas from the depths and the piercing gusts on the rarefied altitudes, had mixed in an elixir conducive to superhuman invulnerability and health in the conquering ranks. Although no official estimate is available of the losses on the other side—which were, no doubt, of a more cruel sort—there remains a solace in the thought that only a picked delegation of the unfortunate Italian youth was compelled to play to the bitter end the play of heroism in behalf of their Roman lord. But there also remains an historical meaning in the inquiry what price was glory. Ariosto, who in one of his jolly octaves had celebrated those captains who succeed in routing the foe without damaging at all their own troops, would have applauded whole-heartedly. Machiavelli would have shaken his skull-like head and scored the cheapness of the victory. If the purpose of the Ethiopian conquest had been the purging of the Italian feeling of inferiority *re* military grandness, the result failed the hope.

For centuries the leading class of Italy, especially the intellectuals, had humiliated themselves and tortured the masses

consigned to their guidance with a crazed self-consciousness opposing their own alleged cowardice to the bravery of ancient Romans or of modern French or Prussians. The foreigners had at first heard the unprovoked confession rather listlessly; then, pressed by its insistence, they had in fairness consented to be satisfied with it. The truth is that—apart from such collective skill as grows from warring generations in the frame of a unitary state—the Italians are neither worse nor better than all other humans. They fight very well for things in which they genuinely believe: e.g., for their personal or family honour or for the safety of a hearth which they know and love. They fight less well, or altogether badly, for things in which they do not believe. An additional truth is that a few years or generations hence, collective and compulsory military prowess will and must be scrapped from the recipe of virtues of which human nobility is made.

But those Italians, wrenching their necks in order to look unturningly backward, or drooping their heads in an effort at self-injuring introspection, hypnotized themselves and such foreigners as liked it with the picture of Charles VIII of France trotting, sword in scabbard, from the Alps to Naples, A.D. 1494, in a country of cowards; when the real fact is that the Italians of the Renaissance, having in mind other things and not knowing for what and against what to fight, looked up at the cavalcade in a comprehensibly relaxed mood. The Battle of Fornovo, in which, awakening, they drove the French out of the country, and that of Ravenna, in which now paradoxically allied with France they battered the Spaniards, were confined to rather remote depositories in their memory, and an episodic shrine, though duly overhung with wreaths, was dedicated to the siege of Florence in 1530, when the Florentines, finally aware of for what and against what to fight, behaved neither better nor worse than Leonidas's rearguard at Thermopylæ. The business of packing honour and unpacking infamy was prosecuted with adequate industriousness through the Risorgimento and the World War, at the close of

which, in 1919, the Italians veiled in modesty their victories on the Piave, which had been neither worse nor better than the others on the other fronts, and started a deafening din about the defeat of Caporetto. The climax of the crescendo was reached in the hundreds and hundreds of pages of a Parliamentary investigation which, however, let the chief culprits alone. That defeat too had been hardly worse than so many other disasters on the Western front; it had been less bad than the disintegrations and flights of the Austrian and of the Russian armies, and more than made up by the ensuing *revanches*. Nevertheless, owing to the successful efforts of the Italians themselves, the name of Caporetto became in all vocabularies of the earth a synonym for wholesale and irretrievable national ignominy.

Then the Fascists came, and carried on, with their usual totalitarianism, the pursuit of disgrace. Whatever the "liberalistic" regimes had done or suffered on battlefields, they branded as military shame; and they finally invited the foreigners, those dreaded umpires, to their own show of resurrected Roman valour in Ethiopia. Now, whatever the liberalistic regimes had done or suffered, including the bloody defeats of 1896 in Tigray, had obviously been better from the angle of military honour; and even in the conquest of Libya in 1911-1912 the disproportion between the Italian and the Turkish forces had not been so crushing, and the price of glory not so nominal. The umpires of 1936, while endorsing as a matter of fact the Fascist estimate of the Italian military record through the ages, complimented the new producers on the efficiency of their equipment and transportation. As for the war, considered according to the standards of real war, the best friends of Italy and Mussolini went around whispering rather audibly that the Ethiopian war had been an operetta.

On the other hand no umpire, past or present, had ever challenged the glory of Italy's being the oldest and most venerable reservoir of civilization on earth. Aside from a few black sheep

—not yet Blackshirts—in the Renaissance, no representative Italian had bespattered with blood and mud the symbols of honour, of piety, of clemency, of generosity. A pathetically impotent desire for national primacy and a persistent confusion of superstition with religion made about all the sins that could be imputed to the tradition of the Italian mind. Even before Christianity, Scipio Africanus had been a sage, Marius had sat, lyrically compassionate, on the ruins of Carthage, Cæsar had averted his horrified eyes from the blood-dripping head of his most powerful antagonist. Pensiveness, forgiveness, mercy, or at least temperance and prudence, are the Muses of Virgil and Horace throughout, and while in many passages of the Latin writers love appears crudely nude, seldom or never do they exhibit an accoutred hatred at which a more humane posterity should blush. Cruelty, however practised in fight or game, was never legalized in their moral system; never did such a deity win admittance either in the tribal cult of the primeval Romans or in the enlightened syncretism of the Empire which opened the way to the Prophets and Christ.

Now, whatever of this really matchless Italian glory of over two thousand years might have survived the Fascist decade, seemed to Fascism an intolerable stain. They hurried to cleanse it. Songs of foulest obscenity, of vilest ferocity, scoffing at the helpless Negus and at his tattered Palatines, were printed on tissue, occasionally tricolour after the national flag, and circulated among organ-grinders; whose belches bubbled up to the kitchen window behind which the servantmaid had been accustomed to warble the kindly Neapolitan tunes of moonlight and wooing. In most of the zealot press, editorials and comments would have nonplussed Thersites: a language unintelligible to the caveman, even if translated into howls, since he, antedating moral distinctions, displayed an innocence of some sort, beyond good and evil.

Two individual instances will be more illuminating than the

national and compulsory perversion, apart from the fact that the documentary evidence of the latter could hardly be inserted in a decent discourse.

A young man, almost an adolescent, went to Ethiopia with the rank of lieutenant in the air force. He had his bombing parties. He circled in the clear sky, he dropped explosives and gases, he stuck a medal for military valour on his undamaged uniform. Returned home, he wrote a book. For who does not write a book in a country where practically nobody now reads any?

"War," he stated, "surely educates and steels, and I recommend it also because I think it is a man's duty to fight at least one." Of how that particular war educated and steeled him he gave detailed account. Apart from playing bridge, dancing, preparing fine meals, and growing a beard which became "well known in all the Empire," what he enjoyed most was the incendiary expeditions to which he was willingly ordered. Much as he had wanted it at home, the opportunity of watching a big fire had constantly been denied him by an invidious destiny. Now, of this repressed desire he had his fill. The name of his flying squad was "The Desperate," its magnanimous motto, "I am a lion." Often, to be sure, the results fell short of the leonine device, "also perhaps because I had anticipated glamorous explosions in the style of the American films, whereas the low Ethiopian huts, made of clay and brushwood, did not afford any satisfaction to the bomber." From time to time, however, missiles of better quality, more substantially stuffed, made up for the disappointments. This kind of bomb, he concedes, "gave satisfaction. At least one might see fire and smoke. We burned carefully all the zone around Makalle, but the people had gone." Naturally the best moments were when and where the people had not gone; since "of making distinction between the military and the civilian population there was practically no possibility." Once he had the privilege of killing from on high a worthwhile—and, needless to say, defenceless—conglomeration of natives; and it made quite a show, in the extra glory of a perfect scenery.

"Closed in a circle of fire, about five thousand Ethiopians made a meagre end. It looked like a hell-pit, the smoke soaring to spectacular heights and the flames supplying with an additional glow the incipient sunset."

This lad's name was Vittorio Mussolini, the Duce's son. He was, so to speak, as guiltless as a sensitized plate. Coldly, stupidly, lifelessly, he rendered an image of parentage and environment, of how Fascist education was moulding the coming generations.

But Badoglio, the witness at the other extreme of the hierarchic ladder, who provides the second and final testimony about the spirit of the conquest, was no papa's lieutenant, no black-shirted boy. An old man, he had grown up and matured in the liberal era; far from being officially a Fascist, he had been considered as a suspect until the very eve of his Ethiopian consulate; and Mussolini's picking him as successor to his own fellow-Quadrivir de Bono had meant in the eyes of all a vindication of the military prestige due to the late liberal monarchy and an adequate sacrifice of Fascist prestige to Fascist safety.

Entering Addis Ababa, he was "obviously immensely happy," as a credible American correspondent, Herbert L. Matthews, phrased it. This hardly conveys a reflection on his attitude. He had overridden in about ten weeks all the towering obstacles which the military editors of the world had piled between him and his goal; he had settled the old, half-secret quarrel between himself and his destiny, which dated back to Caporetto, wiping off the frustration with the triumph and bringing his career to a first-rate close. That he exulted at these and like thoughts is understandable and human, too human.

But he did more than display his glee among the ruins. In the radiant morning of May 11, two days after the proclamation of the new Empire on the seven hills of Rome and on the high plateau of Addis Ababa, he, now a viceroy, assembled a conference of the foreign correspondents and bade them all a

radiant farewell. "When in future years," he said, "seated at your hearths with your families, you look back on the day of taking Addis Ababa, I hope you will think of it, if not with nostalgia, at least as a pleasant memory."

War, lovely war, cleanser of the world, most sportive of all sports: the pleasant memory of which is deservedly spilt, like a bottle of costly wine, near families and hearths! And the Ethiopian war at that: the gassing, searing, mowing, of destitute human herds, who had sinned against themselves alone. That a man of his age and standing could listen to inspirations of that sort sounds almost exonerative for Fascism, which comes out again as an effect rather than the cause, as a visible ulcer rather than the inner disease; since the germs of a general infection carried to Italy by the golden flies of d'Annunzio's poetry and other such breeds had housed long before Fascism in the marrows of so many of the old generation.

He laid down his viceroyalty and went back home, tempering the momentary outburst with more thoughtful utterances about war and peace. His successor in Addis Ababa was one fitter than he, Graziani the Libyan. The black Garibaldis, scorning servitude and waging a futile guerrilla warfare in the back mountains, were taken prisoner, dubbed brigands, and handed over to firing squads. Eventually, on the nineteenth of February, to avenge a miscarried attempt on the viceroy's life, thousands of innocents, including women and children, were massacred in the capital: a gigantic St. Bartholomew after which none of the many glories which old Italy had harvested in her service to humanity and beauty seemed too many to those Italians who sought in allegiance to the past the only possible escape from present shame.

Thus, the military honour of the country having been gambled on the mechanized execution of a scapegoat nation, the name and the beloved lineaments of Italy polluted before the world, her financial and economic reserves squeezed dry, the standard of living of all classes except a party of robber barons

lowered further, and false Eldorados purchased at the price of actual penury, the march on Addis Ababa emerged in its crudity of a sleeveless errand.

Strolling on a secure shore where he needed not be afraid of indiscreet ears, a Fascist, as faithful to the regime as most of his colleagues, summarized the happening in cinematic terms. "The capture of Addis Ababa," said he, "is all right. It reminds one of the final kiss in the ordinary motion picture. The woes will start next day.

"Or," he added, "it reminds me of Peary having reached the North Pole and of his strange feeling that now on all sides it was South. Addis Ababa is the last station of the Fascist march. Wherever they turn, they must go South."

## *The World Confusion*

THE critic, as usual, did not take sufficiently into account the ideal or the emotional results of the event, which in a way were practical too and provided fresh opportunities for another stretch in the Fascist march.

Like Madame Bovary jubilating in the cry: "*J'ai un amant! J'ai un amant!*" the Duce of Fascism could now unload his joy-burdened breast and exclaim: "I have an Empire!" He did it, too, to his heart's content, and while Victor Emmanuel, the unknown king, was promoted to king-emperor and thus lifted with double irony to the rank of his taller colleague in Buckingham Palace, he himself accepted the title of Founder of the Empire which was conferred upon him by the unanimous and spon-



taneous consent of two nations and which very seriously made of him the equal of Augustus and of Cæsar. It was, by chance or not, the eve of the bimillenary, slated for 1937, of the birth of Augustus, which, according to the calendar punctilio playing so large a part in the religion of Fascism, was visibly predesigned to mark a further stage, possibly a decisive one, in the five-year wrecking plan.

Hedda Gabler too, the gloomy Northern cousin of Emma Bovary, the idle general's daughter, the unemployed gun-woman, had found at last a meaning in life when, informed of destruction and death far exceeding her hopes, she had vented her feeling of fulfilment in the words: "At last a deed!" Undoubtedly a hysteria of the kind so stringently searched for by Ibsen and Flaubert in their spasm-ridden females had worked even more effectively than Nietzsche's or Sorel's philtres in the blood of this century's Tamburlaines the Great. This does not mean, however, that Emma's *amant* was not a real lover or that Hedda's deed was no deed at all. Likewise, a substantial amount of reality subsisted through all the void in Fascist flame and blood and in the Fascist Empire.

But there was more than that. Enfranchised at last from the remaining bondages which had made him wail, while talking with Ludwig, about his being unchangeably "a prisoner," the erstwhile village rioter, now Founder of an Empire, could marvel at his place in the sun of a spotless liberty. To be sure, the confused objections which nature opposes to the will of a single individual remained unexhausted, and absolute freedom in action still invited deceptively to an unseizable horizon. But theoretically or virtually free he was, a man beyond all law. The prophecy he had made of himself many years earlier, "the world will tremble at my name," had not yet come true in the plenitude of its import; but the anarchist's revolt had finally broken all fences, and one purpose of Fascism, as worded by a Nazi disciple and recorded by H. F. Armstrong, already belonged in the world of accomplished fact. This purpose was "to will with

cold blood the anarchy of the moral world." All authority had crumbled. Nothing and nobody stood above him.

Seen under this light the march on Addis Ababa appears a projection or allegory, comparatively feeble, of greater things that were happening meanwhile in stouter places, Geneva and London.

To begin with England, that nation had led somehow the advance of mankind toward a goal. Her standards, intellectual and moral, political and economic, ranged higher than the sum of their averages in the most favoured countries of Europe; they were safeguarded by the decisive vigilance of her naval force, an unparalleled blend of gallantry and skill; and no other nation, at least until America would linger on the threshold of her unavoidable but dreaded world responsibilities, seemed prepared to relieve her of her task or to share it with adequate consistency and strength. This leadership had come to England practically unwanted, and had taken her to a place of first among equals. It was moral authority, of a sort, however uncoded: often envied, occasionally hated, exceptionally challenged—at a heavy cost to the challengers—never, in centuries, contemned and vilified.

A talk of English decadence had become audible in recent decades, after the close of the Victorian age. The queen was still living, the British troops were successfully turning the tide of the Boer war, Pretoria had been captured on June 5, 1900, when a penetrant American ambassador, John Hay, could write to Henry Adams, June 15: "The serious thing is the discovery—now past doubt—that the British have lost all skill in fighting, and the whole world knows it, and is regulating itself accordingly. It is a portentous fact, altogether deplorable in my opinion; for their influence on the whole made for peace and civilization."

The discovery was not past doubt, however, and the epitaph sounded premature. This and other such omens were dispersed in the World War and in the years ensuing. The official be-

haviour of England at the peace conferences was far from wise and clairvoyant; but the resources and subtleties of her vitality in passing such tests as the secession of Ireland and the loosening of the ties between metropolis and Empire; her movable steadfastness in trying evolutionary courses in India; her craftsmanship in meeting depression, devaluation, unemployment, together with her early success in reviving prosperity and cheer; her aloofness from both revolutionary mania and involutionary shirt-sleeved pestilence, the contagion of which was fairly soon confined to the mental slums inhabited by Mosleys and Rothermeres: all these and several others were and seemed admirable performances, setting a model of some sort for a confederate world to come, unless the world deliberately chose to run headlong the way of perdition.

Now, in 1936, the latter seemed the working alternative. A fact, more portentous than the one anticipated by the American ambassador of old, had entered the realm of facts. Fascism, a low-grade newcomer in the alinement of historical forces, had challenged England, on the assumption of her decadence. England had accepted the challenge and shunned the fight, thus losing it and handing to the antagonist the Q.E.D. of her alleged decline, which, so long a wishful axiom, was now finally provided with the evidence of a theorem. Not in a private letter like Hay's to Adams, but in an immensely circulated daily, a sober writer, F. T. Birchall, could not refrain from dramatizing the event. "Since the last jubilee," he cabled to the *New York Times* on May 25, "Britain has suffered a blow to her pride such as she has not felt since the Dutch sailed up the Thames in Charles II's time and their ships patrolled the Channel with brooms at the mastheads."

The gentlemanly expediency of ignoring black eyes received in the course of an ill-fated jaunt in an ill-famed quarter would hardly have seemed to do in the present case, so publicly, and resoundingly, and systematically iterated, rained the blows. What had once been the moral authority of England was stultified by

Germany on the Rhine as well as by people of minor standing in sundry other places. Revolts flared in the Empire from the Nile and Palestine to the Indus, obviously financed and drilled by Fascism, whose Duce went so far as to proclaim himself, in March 1937, the Protector of Islam: a bit of fun not so clear if exemplified in the real mischiefs he was really brewing. Yet a stoic indifference was the kind of attitude adopted by England. She braced herself to take whatever additional offences the emboldened adversaries might like to inflict on her, and kept drafting and signing gentlemen's agreements with them. Meanwhile, all faith in reason and fairness spent for the time being, and the Fascist belief in force accepted instead, she resolved to invest a stupendous amount of her wealth in a sky-climbing rearmament plan.

The consequences in domestic policy were even more impressive than in the international and military fields. The contention that England, during and after the Ethiopian war, tiptoed, as it were, from the already dwindling society of democratic nations does not differ altogether from truth. Freedom is a flower of peace; it withers in war, or on the frightened eve of anticipated war. Accordingly the spirit of the democratic, or at least liberal, institutions of England was asked to absent itself awhile. The process had begun as early as December 1935, when Baldwin's Cabinet, after the forced resignation of Hoare, remained in power, developing to all lengths that very same policy of Hoare which Parliament, country, and Cabinet had agreed to reprove. Eden, the apostle of the League of Nations, called to the post of Hoare and confronted with a dilemma between fidelity to himself and allegiance to the party, chose the latter. Hoare, not many weeks later, was taken anew aboard the governmental ship, very near to the helm. The party in office, an oligarchy of nobility and wealth, summed up in itself all responsibilities of power: in the genuine hope, certainly, of saving, by means of a disguised emergency rule on the margins of a formally preserved constitution, not themselves alone but the

country and the Empire, and if possible the world. Censorship, of the subtlest and most ductile sort, like the legendary Oriental executioner's blade which beheaded the victim without hurting the nape—censorship, not paragraphed in laws but no less effective than if it had been, was established on the press, on assemblies, on courts. Quietus was put upon the trial of an alleged lunatic who had thrown a gun at the passing king and then confided to the judges that an unnamed foreign embassy had encouraged his act and more than that act. This king, a king of hearts whose mores did not dovetail with the aristocratic pattern or maybe with any pattern at all, and whose unpredictable inspirations might become a cause of concern if ever the day of battle dawned, was disposed of overnight. Finally, to exhilarate doubting hearts and to subdue for a moment the din of hammers and pistons in thousands of war factories, a hyperbolic pageantry of coronation was staged: whose glamorous obsolescence would have seemed otherwise objectionable in the year of destiny 1937.

As for the League of Nations, the moral prestige of which was inextricably interwoven with England's authority and power, insult was added to injury. It moved to a majestic new palace, gorgeously outfitted and shining with all splendours, although not conclusively embellished by the "beautiful flames" which d'Annunzio and his pupil Vittorio Mussolini would have deemed fitting for the event and for the place. There, in the majestic new palace, sat a bench of judges at whom the defendants thumbed their noses.

All misfortunes and shortcomings of previous days had been defective preludes to so thorough a bankruptcy. America had disowned the League, Russia had joined it all too tardily, Japan and Germany had quit and gone their own ways undisturbed. But until 1936 the failure of the League, offset in part by success, had appeared in the aspect much rather of impotence than of suicidal surrender. A police not supported by all law-abiding communities, not provided with arms, confronted with oversize

outlaws, the League had proved unable to bring them all to justice. But Germany and Japan themselves, even while deserting the court and forestalling its verdict, had acknowledged somehow the validity of justice, like outlaws taking to the woods.

Fascism on the contrary had stuck to its place in the Assembly and the Council. This it had done mainly with the purpose of avoiding the risks involved, however obscurely, in a clear-cut break. But it had gained, besides, the chance of overthrowing the League from inside. The chance materialized.

If, subsequent to the march on Addis Ababa, the League had again branded the aggressor and ejected him from his place in Geneva, it would hardly have resurrected the victim but it might have saved a greater part of its own honour and future. Nobody in Geneva thought earnestly of ejecting the aggressor. Many entertained openly the thought of welcoming him fondly like a prodigal but successful son, in the hope that he, once satiated with raw materials and raw sacrifices, would not only behave but also co-operate against other prospective aggressors, signally Hitler.

Fairly convinced that now anything might go, the Duce assured Ward Price, special correspondent of Rothermere's *Daily Mail*, that he renounced any further colonial ambition, that the victory in East Africa put Italy into the group of "satisfied powers," and that the League "can and must go on." In the course of the interview he extended the hand of friendship to Great Britain. He was eagerly believed, or they acted as if he were.

As soon as Laval, so late, was ousted, and honest Blum took his place in Paris, Great Britain rushed to withdraw whatever menacing apparatus she kept steaming in the Mediterranean, lest Socialist and societarian France might feel an irrepressible urge to join her at the eleventh hour and pledge staunch support to a fighting League. The alarm was unjustified. Neither did Blum as yet feel so firm in the saddle nor was French opinion, not even the best part of it, so spiritedly keen about embracing whole-heartedly a cause which they supposed to be the par-

ticular business of England: which they reproached, not wholly without reason, as having minded her own exclusive business too often; e.g., when before the Ethiopian wrangle she had concluded, over the heads of both the League and France, a private naval agreement with Hitler.

The final scenes were played in Geneva in the first week of July. England and France unitedly proposed to the League that the sanctions against the aggressor be lifted in the immediate future. The motion was carried; a date was set. A stupendous result emerged for the winner. England and the League, while carefully avoiding whatever might really have imperilled the gambler, had constantly and lavishly multiplied the stake. He was now, clearing the table, allowed to claim that not Ethiopia alone had been vanquished by him, but fifty-two nations, the League, the world, "the hugest coalition ever seen in history."

The victim, in the person of Haile Selassie, was admitted to attend the acquittal of the aggressor. This presence was deemed an intolerable offence to Fascist honour. Conducted by an invisible baton from the Press Ministry in Rome, the Fascist or Fascistized Italian correspondents in the tribune vomited a symphonic clamour of boos, abuse, and hisses, over the head of the suppliant: a feat as chivalric as had been the war. Some of them had in better years written delicate books of poetry and love. Now they were faced with the dilemma of losing either soul or job; and they stuck to the latter.

When the hurricane subsided, the thin, weary voice of the fugitive had its chance. He spoke in the tone of a Cassandra; for it is natural that Cassandras come out of burned citadels. It did not require an unusual effort of imagination for such a soothsayer to prophesy that what the gentlemen at Geneva were doing entailed deadly dangers for all, and that the reward to the aggressor was tantamount to the destruction of all decency, security, and lawfulness in the world.

The black man's prophecy, however, was to be confirmed seven months later by Sir Samuel Hoare, First Lord of the

British Admiralty. "The world," he declared in a speech to the Bradford Chamber of Commerce on February 5, 1937, "is in a greater state of confusion than at any other time since the breakup of the Roman Empire." The silence on the part which he personally had played in the epochal conjuncture was as humanly comprehensible as the historical statement was correct.

Until the end of ancient Rome and in the long centuries since, except for a comparatively short interval in the darkest age of the barbarian invasions, an Empire, a Church, a Holy or half-Holy Alliance, a concert of the Powers, an international covenant, a legitimacy, a code, an authority, something, somewhere, somehow, had always subsisted to hamper if not to stop the course of human bestiality. Now the Church was mixed in adultery with Molochs and Goliaths, and all the rest had broken. The earth was emancipated.

In conformity with the League's decision the sanctions were lifted on July 15, 1936.

## *March on Madrid*

NOW the danger for Fascism was that the fire, so painstakingly started in Ethiopia but confined thus far to so remote a territory, might die out there. The leading mind of Fascism saw to it that a complaisant wind should transport the sparks to more promising haystacks.

This had already happened twenty-five years before. Italy first had kindled the torch in another province of Africa, Libya. The Balkan peoples had taken it, still flickering, from the hand



of Italy ere she dropped it at Ouchy near Geneva, where her peace with Turkey was signed. Revived by their combined efforts and kept well aflame for a sufficient time, it had left a stump which eventually, hurled at a royal equipage, ignited the world.

The analogies were striking. But then, during the preliminaries of the World War, the chain of events had been involuntary and fatal, except the first act, which to the mind of Giolitti had appeared as a business of very restricted liability. This time it was a scheme, scientifically articulate, although founded on the dubious assumption that history repeats itself like physical phenomena in laboratories.

The unnamed critic quoted above was wrong when contending that Fascism, having reached the North Pole of its fortunes at Addis Ababa, was unavoidably bound South. Wrong were the Italian Antifascists, including some in the brilliant groups of exiles in Paris around the weeklies *Giustizia e Libertà* and *Nuovo Avanti*, when explaining the Ethiopian war as an emergency diversion and exit of Mussolini from domestic difficulties. This criterion, valid for Napoleon III, who, rising as the Emperor of Peace, advanced, of necessity, in wars and tumbled in defeat, valid also for other usurpers of that middling calibre, is misapplied in the case of Fascism. Here the lust for war, far from being an offshoot of tyranny, had been the seed and root of it.

Had Mussolini been such as figured by so many friends and enemies—both biased alike, perhaps, by a desire to belittle him—a course at once imperative and easy would have dictated his steps after July 15, 1936. Hundreds of thousands of square miles had been annexed; glory, or what he called so, had been reaped; a prodigious prestige had accrued to his cause, winning many reluctant Italian hearts and cementing his power. On the other hand, the economic and financial outlook was frightening, and England felt sore. To be and to feel satisfied, as he had said to Ward Price he was, to negotiate a foreign loan, to besprinkle poor Italy with a few drops from the new wave of prosperity

which was wetting happier shores, while developing as best he could "the resources of the new-won Empire," to allay the rancours, to win back the estranged friends: this would have been the advice of wisdom and the suggestion of convalescent nature. This also had been in the minds of the peacemakers at Geneva when promulgating peace to all men of good and of bad will around the corpse of immolated Ethiopia.

But ideas are insatiable, like Dante's she-wolf, hungering more after the meal than before; and an idea—however greater than he—was the ultimate spring of the Duce's conduct. No sooner had the curtain fallen on Geneva than it rose in front of Gibraltar. An interval of just three days elapsed between the League's pardon and the Fascist uprising in Morocco and Spain.

No conclusive documentary evidence makes compelling as yet either the theory that General Franco acted merely as an agent of the mighty in Rome and Berlin, or the opposite contention that the revolt was born spontaneously of Spanish unrest. The tight nexus of dates binding together the Exit at Geneva with the Entrance at Cadiz supplies but one bit of circumstantial evidence in behalf of the former thesis. Spain, as early as 1923—long before the crash in Wall Street and the world-depression had provided Fascism with opportunities for world-expansion—had chosen to be an isolated experimental field for the acclimation of the Italian plant in foreign soil. This leisurely Spanish Fascism, headed by a dictator, Primo de Rivera, who took the office *pro tempore* and would stroll unguarded like a liberal Premier, occasionally relaxing in a café, had disintegrated, strangely enough, in January 1930, when the star of Fascism was peering on so many other and so much larger horizons. The monarchy had followed its destiny soon. The new republic, supported by most of labour and by many intellectuals whose attitude, remarkably different from the surrender of their Italian colleagues, had embittered the days of Rivera, became nevertheless engaged in a hard fight against the pressure of vested interests anxious for a restoration, as well as against dis-

ruptive and centrifugal forces chronic in Spain. Its course was devious, between radicalism of some sort and compromise or even relapse into repressive reaction; until in 1936, partly as an imitation of the Popular Front now ruling France, it definitely steered to the left. This did not happen, however, without blunders and law-breaking; nor could it be expected that the ascendancy of Fascism and Nazism in domestic and international politics abroad might leave untroubled the losing parties in Spain. The hypothesis that Franco's revolt was first planned in Spain herself belongs in the realm of positive probabilities.

But positive matter of fact is it that Italian Fascism knew of the revolt well in advance, and that a squadron of airplanes took off from Italy to Morocco on the day before its open outbreak. Moreover, the sedition was promptly stamped out in continental Spain; so that it would have passed into history as an abortive putsch, had not Franco been able to transport an army of Moorish mercenaries into his perverted fatherland with the mission of restoring it to moral order and Christian faith. This transportation was accomplished with means lent by the Italian armed forces, and under the direct supervision of Fascist military and consular agencies in Morocco. It may be true that Franco started the revolt; but it is true that Mussolini kindled the so-called civil war. Germany, as everybody was to realize a few months later, played second fiddle always.

This time no rationalization of the enterprise might have been constructed under the well-known items of outlets for Italian overpopulation, or even of vengeance for forty-year-old defeats. It was naked will to power. The purpose was twofold. Seen from the Vatican observatory it was the recapture of Spain, once a most devout flock and now gone astray, into the bounds of the Roman Catholic Empire. Seen from the foreign and military offices of Fascism it also was the redemption, although by proxy for a time, of a land which had been a province of the Roman Empire; while, more concretely and immediately, it was the acquisition of a prodigious field of manoeuvre for the next world

war. Under this latter angle the Iberian peninsula promised more than to fill in inspiring symmetry such requirements as in the preliminaries of the first World War had been met by the Balkan peninsula; which, besides, had proved in recent years strangely refractory to all incendiary industry. To begin with, ores and quicksilver in Spain were valuable assets for the fabrication of cannon and ammunition. This was, however, a minor attraction. A Fascist Spain meant the completion of a Nazi-Fascist ring encircling France; a Fascist Majorca meant a Damoclean sword on the lifeline between France and her African Empire; a Fascist Morocco facing a Fascist Cadiz and a Fascist Malaga meant a noose in which British Gibraltar might be strangled. Two of the three Mediterranean pillars of England—Suez and Malta—were already virtually under fire; the third and most important was now taken care of. The Fascist admiralty in Rome and the dying Marconi were asked, passionately, relentlessly, to produce some contrivance which, dashing or working from Ceuta, might sink wholesale a British fleet steaming across the Straits. The answers from the technicians did not sound so sanguine as hoped. But the day might dawn.

All this was so obvious that it does not seem equally obvious how England could remain impassive. She remained so, however. Even Mussolini's crescendo of alarums of general war, his keeping the country in permanent mobilization and trampling, his mustering with popping eyes full-sized armies while figuring in vociferous words the sum total of the Fascist forces, actually second in numbers to none except Russia's, as "a wood of eight million bayonets" out of which, to top the show, he picked and shook in the face of the world an olive twig no less pointed than any bayonet: all this sound and fury left England seemingly unperturbed. She did not reread the formal speech, written several years earlier by an unnamed Italian scholar and delivered by Mussolini at the University of Perugia, in which he had extolled the Roman *geste* against Carthage, adumbrating by Carthage, clearly enough, France and Britain. Nor did she seem to mind

the more recent and quite outspoken speech in which he claimed for Italy, under no Roman-Carthaginian disguise, "an ocean-going fleet." Nay, the alternative of quitting the Mediterranean and reverting to the lengthy detour around the Cape of Good Hope was calmly weighed in England, despite vague rumours of Germany's considering a naval base on the Nazi-Fascistized Canary Islands which might vary the monotony of the British periplus with unexpected occurrences.

Perhaps the English Fortinbras was advancing at scheduled pace toward the scene of the English Hamlet's catastrophe. The former's frame of mind had consisted at many other times of resoluteness with calm and even phlegm. Perhaps the plan of England was, as visioned by so many observers, to "gird and not speak a word," like Dante's bachelor in the imminence of his final examination: to stave off all dangers of immediate fight while gathering so much strength as to face a future war with all chances of victory, probably thereby averting it. On the other hand it was patent that a number of magnates and clubmen in England, having taken the routine dilemma of Fascism and Communism for granted anent Spain also, and having tinted in bullfight-red the motley Loyalists of Madrid, sincerely inclined toward Franco, whose cause they thought was the cause of social order and discipline—besides some minor corollaries concerning the trade in oranges and sherry wine plus the dividends in the mining business. That the victory of the Madrid Government would have focalized the Communist infection in Western Europe seemed to them above doubt; whereas they entertained a no less sincere hope that Franco, when once in the saddle, would veer to powerful England, leaving behind the Nazi and Fascist auxiliaries of the eve. These motives of national purpose and class-consciousness worked intricately, intermingled even in the individual souls of several British statesmen. The resultant was the unprecedented device of the non-intervention committee, purposed to stave off a general war while helping the cause of Franco, although not quite so well as he might have wished.

France, in turn, was torn between the Popular Front at the helm and the ladies and gentlemen assuring each other in the Parisian drawing rooms that—not to speak of the Latin dictators Mussolini and Franco—they would have liked Hitler himself much rather than Blum, the Marxist Jew, as the ruler of France. Whenever the Popular Front in Paris gave sign of somehow stirring in behalf of the Popular Front in Madrid, it found itself with one hand tied by the opponents at home and the other stopped by England and her non-intervention committee.

Through the paper screen of diplomatic non-intervention, Fascist and, in a minor measure, Nazi help, man-power, armament, money, flowed ceaselessly to the Fascist camp in Spain. Soviet aid, more fragmentary, came to the Loyalist side. Gallant Antifascist volunteers, recruited among Italian and German exiles as well as among leftists from France and other countries, together with some handfuls of mercenaries and adventurers, rushed to Madrid; adventurers and evildoers, together with a surprising legion of genuine Irish-Catholic volunteers, joined Franco's Babelic agglomeration. In the process of weeks and months Spain became hostess to what was called a miniature world war: with fire and death and ruin and moan not so Lilliputian, however. Behind the screen of non-intervention, neutral civilization looked on, interested and bewildered, as if at a cock-fight.

The evidence that, if England and France had unsheathed their swords, if the League of Nations had awakened in its grave, the Duce—not adequately seconded by his German seconder—would have withdrawn from Spain and postponed to better days the big parade of world war, is of a kind different from the evidence offered above concerning his prospective attitude at the start of the Ethiopian war. It is nevertheless decisive. Had Mussolini made up his mind for the best and the worst, had he firmly considered the alternative of an Anglo-French defiance, he would obviously have concentrated on the will of grabbing the fullest and earliest possible victory in Spain. This means

that, spurning all diplomatic committees, he would have shipped there a regular and adequate army, though not quite of Ethiopian size, with all paraphernalia of civilizing warfare, including some precious chemicals. But despite all the consolations that he had received from England during and after the Ethiopian affair, he did not trust her altogether; and even her reticent phlegm, along with other and more expressive premonitory signs, loomed at times uncanny. Owing to the reasonableness of such misgivings, whatever forces he sent to Spain he sent in half-secrecy and half-efficiency, while archiving in the meantime a stupendous documentary material to show to the neutral Powers, should the worst come to the worst, that he had been no less correctly neutral than any of them and that his units and divisions in Spain had been nothing else than casual aggregations of free-willed volunteers. Again, he chose the vulpine technique, in the expectation again of the lion's day.

The ideological results of the technique were splendid. That no war was declared was no novelty at all; the custom now responded to a well-established tradition. But, incontestably for the first time in history, it happened that a ruler could engage his nation in a secret war, not only without asking about its will and feelings but without even permitting it to know what liberties he was taking with its blood and gold. Never before had a despot or anarchist been so totally free. The military results, however, proved less satisfactory. Many of the Fascist soldiers were untrained beginners or worn-out veterans; a considerable percentage was made up of starving unemployed who had volunteered for hard labour in Ethiopia or somewhere else, then to realize on the high seas that the ship's bow was steering west, to Cadiz, where landed they clambered aboard a truck and rolled to an unwanted battlefield.

The government of Franco was officially acknowledged by Fascism and Nazism in November, far too prematurely. The march on Madrid had been prefigured as one more in the long list of Fascist marches, with the usual rhythm and irresistible

cheer: another performance like the March on Rome, or on Vatican City, or on Berlin, or on Addis Ababa, or on Geneva. But the unexpected happened. It was a long way to Madrid; and it became longer when Franco's army set foot in a suburb of Madrid, there to churn for months and seasons thereafter as though caught in the teeth of a trap.

Yet an upturn came about somewhere, somehow, in the middle of the winter. Immediately upon having signed the latest of his gentlemen's agreements with England, Mussolini hurried to reinforce his army of occupation in Andalusia proportionately to the aim. The Italian forces, brass bands and banners in front, entered Malaga on February 8, 1937. Many in the world had until then indulged in the wonted benevolence toward Italian Fascism, wishfully believing that Hitler, not Mussolini, was the real invader of Spain; nay, averring that the Duce felt uneasy at the thought of Germany's taking a foothold on the Mediterranean. Now the dazzling evidence, piercing even through the ostrich's sand, was registered with mixed feelings. A large section of British opinion, none the less, welcomed the rumour that the Loyalist army was cracking and the Antifascist volunteers were homesick, and looked forward with relieved hearts to a speedy finish of the "civil war."

Mussolini now felt that the moment had come to lift a hem of the veil of secrecy before his nation and to let them have a glimpse, so far prohibited, of the fact that they were engaged in a war and that they were winning it, too. The press was ordered to praise with convenient fervour the part which Fascist "volunteers" had played in the capture of Malaga and were, more generally, playing in the redemption of the sister nation Spain from the red peril. A motion picture was shown in several theatres, featuring Italian trucks, Italian cannon, Italian soldiers in Malaga, who smiled from the screen at their astonished fiancées in the audience. Then after a short time the film was removed, like an hors d'œuvre that should not be allowed to interfere with the appetite for a heartier meal.



The final dash of the march on Madrid was scheduled for March. The interval was filled with the mass massacres in Addis Ababa and with an incursion of Fascist marines in Shanghai to smash the projector and to teach a lesson to the patrons of a cinema divulging the conquest of Ethiopia in a light more favourable to truth than to Fascism. On the eve of spring the Duce embarked for a triumphal journey in Libya, in the course of which he was to proclaim himself the protector of Islam on the whole planet. From aboard the battleship ploughing a Mare Nostrum in which fairly soon all intruders would drown, he radioed exhortatory salutes to his troops beleaguering Madrid. Everything had been arranged that, returning home, he might find on his desk the capture of Madrid, ready for use in the most worshipped holiday of the Fascist calendar, which has so many: the twenty-third of March, eighteenth anniversary of the foundation of the Fasci.

Obedient to orders, the Duce's troops marched on Madrid. They were stopped at Brihuega and driven back in unspeakable confusion. The dead, many shot by their very companions in disorder or frenzy, were numbered at least by hundreds: a toll probably higher than all the price of blood the Italians had paid for the Ethiopian conquest. Other hundreds were taken prisoner; still others passed eagerly to the ranks of the enemy, whom they acknowledged as brothers; a stupendous booty of trucks, ammunition, and guns fell into the hands of the republican victors. This happened on March 18, and was called the Rout of Guadalajara.

Twelve days earlier Edgar Ansel Mowrer had cabled from Paris to America: "It is reported that the Italians are moving north to save Toledo and storm Madrid. Many Europeans are looking forward to the first encounter between the conquerors of Ethiopia and the Antifascists of the international brigade. . . . Here, rather than in Africa, will be a splendid opportunity to test the extent to which Premier Benito Mussolini has improved the fighting quality of the Italian soldier." For days

and months after the Battle of Guadalajara it was as if an innumerable choir of writers and cartoonists, catcallers and whistlers, on both sides of the Atlantic, had tuned in the leitmotiv lightly jotted by Mowrer, and developed it to all lengths. The testing of the Italian soldier had been done. The outcome had been crushing.

True it is that, aside from the choir, Karl H. von Wiegand, dean of American war correspondents, wrote on April 26: "Some of the Italian units fought with great valour under appalling weather conditions." He wrote from Berlin to the Hearst press, and was heeded not. True also it is that Hemingway had written on March 28: "Reports that Brihuega was simply an air victory, with columns stampeded and panicked without fighting, are corrected when the battlefield is studied. It was a bitterly fought seven-day battle, much of the time rain and snow making auto transport impossible. In the final assault, under which the Italians broke and ran, the day was just practical for flying, and 120 planes, sixty tanks, and about 10,000 government infantrymen routed three Italian divisions of 5000 men each. . . . The scrub oak woods northwest of the palace of Ibarra, close to an angle in the Brihuega and Utande road, are still full of Italian dead that burial squads have not yet reached. Tank tracks lead to where they died, not as cowards but defending skilfully constructed machine-gun and automatic-rifle positions, where the tanks found them and where they still lie." Hemingway, an unsuspected eyewitness and an author of high repute, was not heeded either.

The pattern, the hereditary convention created by the Italians themselves about their unfitness in combat, reclaimed the wonted tribute. Even the fact that at any rate the Antifascist Italian battalions on the Loyalist side had had their share in the defeat of the Italian Fascists, was given only cursory attention.

Empire, meanwhile, according to Mussolini the uppermost expression of national and human power and greatness, the new Roman Empire in Ethiopia, was receiving its crowns of honour,

after the slaughters in Addis Ababa, from Senator Borah, comparing the Italians of today to Huns and cavemen, or from Bruce Bliven, addressing Marshal Graziani: "I discovered that I urgently wished your assassin had been successful and that you, and all the other Italian invaders of Ethiopia, were dead." "In a world possessed of a modicum of sanity," wrote an American daily, not radical at all, concerning the British-Italian quarrel over the invitation of Ethiopia to the coronation in London, "one might expect Haile Selassie to refuse to attend a coronation dishonoured by the presence of an Italian, rather than the other way about." Never before in centuries had Italy been insulted so blatantly.

As to the quest for military glory, the idol to which hundreds of thousands of Italian youths had sacrificed their blood in the last forty years, the answer from all four winds repeated—Caporetto, the name of ignominy. And had they even won ten Austerlitzes, at their first unfortunate skirmish they would have heard the name of Caporetto, inexorably again. Miaja, the Loyalist commander, declared that Mussolini's army was made of tin soldiers. A rhyme was circulated: "*Los de Mussolini—fueron los primeros—de entrar en Madrid—pero, prisioneros.*"—They were the first to enter Madrid: as prisoners, though.

Spain had not been captured, and honour had been shattered. That part of the world, still considerably large, where opinion was not yet controlled by Mussolini and Hitler, found a sort of solace in spitting at the Italian nation to spite its oppressor.

Right it was, however, if right it is that slaves should not be honoured for having yielded to enslavement. Right was it, too, although in injustice, if right it is that such obsessively stupid, preposterously neurotic desires as the will to military boast and primacy in the art of killing should be chastised by destiny and by men.

## Epilogue

WITH spring advancing in 1937 it looked as though a halt had finally been bidden to the march of Fascism—at the gates of Madrid. Historic sieges of historic cities—Vienna breaking the Turkish impact at the eleventh hour, Paris quickening to life in the very sweat of agony and making of the measurable river Marne a forbidding gulf, Warsaw itself emerging safe from the Bolshevist avalanche and blocking it for ever—these and such other prodigious upturns of fate recurred to the memory at the sight of an untrained plebs with a few knights-errant, winged or not, in their midst overpowering the world-enveloping blackness before which the League of fifty Nations and the British Empire had retreated. What labourers, adolescents, even women, did in the trenches of the once easy-going city, in the sierras of Cordoba, in the precincts of Bilbao, voided of all meaning many so far firmly established tenets: among them the scientific opinion that the time for popular and individual heroism was over, war and revolution being now the performances of steel robots managed by one steel brain; and the other opinion according to which the Latin nations, grown up and then grown senile against the backgrounds of authority and servitude, had no word more to say for the progress of man. Fascism, to be sure, being nothing else in the last analysis than the conditioned reflex of another resurgent pseudo-classicism and the political gesture of a second pseudo-Catholic Counter-Reformation, had hatched in the old metropolis of authority and servitude, Rome, or by chance in one of the Roman suburbs in Romagna. But it was not far from the Aranjuez and Escorial of Philip II, it was in the immediate vicinity

of the places consecrated to Inquisition and autos-da-fé, that the Marquis of Posa was fighting his most splendid fight. Like a David he had risen, unprophesied. Clanking in his brass, bellowing in his jaws, Goliath had claimed: "Am I not a Philistine?" Indeed, he was. Then he had been hit in the centre of his forehead, the seat of his mind, i.e., of his nothingness.

Thus hope and poetry construed the events, unafraid at the many chances still left that, not only Bilbao, but Madrid and Valencia and Barcelona might still fall and Fascism, leaping to a final effort, eventually might gain sway over another dead nation. Even in this worst and most abominable of cases, they argued, it would be too late for the victor to take advantage of Spain as he had planned in July 1936. Vigilance now guarded the Pyrenees and Gibraltar, Hitler was hesitant, and Franco himself hated his Roman master. The fruit had rotted on the branch before coming within the plunderer's reach; and time, beyond Spain, was at work against Fascism.

At the gates of another Western and mostly Latin capital the march of Fascism had been arrested in April. No blast or bloodshed had marked the holiday when Degrelle, a rising Belgian Mussolini, had challenged to a decisive by-election the liberal conservative Premier van Zeeland; and the battle of Brussels, the city which had been of Egmont as Madrid of Posa, was one merely of ballots and words. To Gallo-Roman nerve and Flemish buoyancy a Catholic prelate—one at least, one at last!—added the force of his indignation at such a thing as the claim of Fascism, or Rexism, its Belgian brood, to the connivance of the Christian Church; but David there, which is a name for inspiration and reason, needed no sling or stone to split the empty forehead of the advancing idiot. The day was won, as it were, by two donkeys promenading in Brussels; one ridden by a poster announcing: "I vote for Rex," the other completing the sentence, or bray, with the words: "Because I am an ass." In other places too the strategy of laughter might have won the battle, had it been chosen timely; since horror may appeal with a sort of weird

charm, whereas stupidity is repulsive altogether—and the latter far exceeds the former in the Fascist mind.

To these local happenings, either commanding in the sheer greatness of a popular epic or even spiced with that sense of humour which often accompanies the decay of an exhausted idea, other considerations were added, of far-reaching import. Fascism, it is true, had been born in Italy of the perversity of a few and of the stupidity of many, without any imperative economic or social necessity of any sort. But there, to the vacuum of Italian life, it had been confined for years, feeding on whatever crumbs of economic and social reality it had happened to chance upon at home, until the world-depression had provided it with the objective stuff it had lacked so far and with the opportunities thereto connected for expansion and victory. In a similar way a mental disorder, having lurked in the recesses of personality, may profit at last by some organic process meeting its need for destruction, and in close alliance with physical disease make final havoc of body and soul. Now, however, the social body in the world at large was recovering, at least where salaries, employment, trade were concerned; a new cycle of prosperity in business had set in in America; the liberal institutions, bruised or maybe wounded but not at all vanquished, had survived in all the English-speaking countries, in France, in some minor but exemplary communities like the Scandinavian kingdoms; these nations, significantly enough, made up the totality of those endowed long since with the highest civilization quotients; their steadfastness in the "surpassed" democratic ideologies had not been rewarded with utmost ruin, as anticipated by Fascism; on the contrary, the difference in standards of living and in pursuit of happiness between those rotten democracies and the "self-sufficient" European autocracies now was nothing short of appalling: a flagrant evidence of failure which, together with the atrocities in Germany and Italy, in Ethiopia and Spain, had swiftly obliterated most traces of benevolence of the Western world toward any brand of Fascism. It seemed impossible to

optimist observers that such truths should not seep, increasingly intrusive, through the deaf walls enclosing Germany and Italy, and bring home to one hundred million slaves that wickedness and foolishness do not pay, and that the loss of the soul is not even remunerated with the body's welfare.

Presages of not distant changes seemed simultaneously to throw encouraging gleams on the most distant part of the scene. Chinese resistance of some sort was stiffening before the march of Japan, in former years so nimble. In Japan herself the elections of 1937, however moderately attended by the masses and however unlikely to dispossess immediately the militaristic cliques permanently standing behind the changing governments, had clearly indicated what ways, liberal and Antifascist throughout, a large majority of the people was shifting. At any rate they had proved that a popular opinion still existed in that country, with the right and the force to express itself, and that Japanese Fascism sorely lagged behind the achievements of its sturdier brothers in Italy and Germany. The prospective role of Japan in the five-year wrecking plan had been carefully studied both in Rome and in Berlin. Obviously it was the part of her army and navy to engage so much of Russia's strength as to make Fascism and Nazism feel comfortable on their eastern fronts; thus, without prejudice to any supplementary inspiration of the moment, the yellow fellow, a kind of Havequick, was scheduled to lend a loyal hand to Bully and Holdfast, or whatever be the names of the gigantic brigands staged in Goethe's *Faust*. Now, however, for all Japan's single-handed grabbing in North China, it did not any longer seem so past doubt that East and West should meet in thunder and storm.

Limping and slow like the vengeful deity Ate, but inescapable as well, British rearmament was advancing meanwhile behind the scene. Optimist observers took it for granted that Britain was making up thereby, quite suitably, for all her own and the others' blunders and defaults in previous years; nor did it seem too rosy a daydream for them to presume that the adversaries,

delayed by perplexity and dissension, might ultimately act like that commander-in-chief who at the battle of Fontenoy waved his plumed hat and voiced the incredible call: "*Messieurs les Anglais, tirez les premiers!*" If that moment came, if the English gentlemen were given the privilege of choosing the moment and of shooting first, then, most probably, neither they nor any other would have to fire a single shot. Then, the black and brown clouds would disperse in a renovating sky. This happy moment, with England fully equipped and ready to avert war through readiness to war, was presumed to be due some time in 1938. Eden, devious in action but firm in belief, had a definite—and apparently sensible—idea when saying early in 1937 that those erred who entertained fears of war for 1938 or later. In 1937 or never—he clearly intimated—will the world conflagrate.

Such was the hopeful picture in the spring of 1937. It belonged to the realm of conceivable probabilities that this book, now speeding to its close, should encompass the whole history of Fascism; all that was left out, even if to last for years, amounting to hardly more than a weary epilogue.

Certainly it would have been excellent if Fascism had consented to de cease of itself, in a languor of disintegration. War, world war, would have been a terrific price for the attainment of that goal; for war, including Antifascist war, is Fascism of a sort, is Death, both physical and spiritual; and many are its ways of killing the souls even when the bodies are spared. Revolution too, although a minor evil if compared with world-conflagration, entails its part of frenzy and tyranny. It certainly would have been splendid if Fascism had accepted the British suggestion of sinking in itself, almost unobtrusively and gently, of expiring in the exhalations of its own miasmas: thus acknowledging itself as a perversion more deserving of putrefaction than of death in fight or fire.

But the founder and leader of Fascism in Rome was aware of the Fascist plight. He did not feel like the courteous captain of the eighteenth century, in laces and feathers, and the idea of



asking the English to shoot first did not appeal to him. To Delcroix, president of the Italian war veterans, who questioned him what it was all about—the wild rumours in the rank and file of an imminent war—he rejoined bluntly: “I surely cannot wait for England to have completed her armament.”

His and his friends’ diplomatic activities, aimed at shaping a convenient alinement, for the purpose of immediate and general war, gained a portentous momentum between winter and spring. The reverses in Spain supplied additional impulses to the vigour and hurry of the manipulations. While storing immense supplies of wheat and oil hurriedly bought in all continents, he did not shrink before any sacrifice which might inflame the zeal of a doubting ally or ward off the grudge of an invidious neighbour. Austria, this apple of his eye, was devotedly placed, with Fascism’s compliments, on the lap of Germany, and Austria’s Chancellor Schuschnigg summoned to Venice, there, stunned, to be notified of his new whereabouts. The Italian sacrosanct Irredenta, on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, whose forfeiture was only too mildly atoned for by Sforza and the other renouncers in banishment and disgrace; the holy land, the pity of which under the barbarian Slav had made the very start of Mussolini’s career, nay, the very cornerstone of Fascism, and whose redemption had built the only visible constant in the giddy reel of the Duce’s desire; Dalmatia, in one word, was overnight adjudged to Yugoslavia for ever, in a gentlemen’s agreement intended to relieve the Fascist navy of a threat on its left flank when the day of the big showdown with England in the Mediterranean should dawn. From humble origins in a crawling plebeian environment, in a provincial nook smelling of garbage and wine, he had risen to be the antagonist—the equal!—of the finest and of the greatest thing on earth, of England and of the British Empire: an arch-Catilina, an arch-Erostratos, the world-arsonist. He did not consider being demoted from the hard-won dignity without utmost resistance. The line of his resistance was the Rome-Berlin axis. To begin with, the Jews in Italy were convincingly urged to be-

have as full-blooded Fascists in Rome, while paying due homage to their Nazi friend in Berlin. Toward the axis a swarm of minor states were intensively instructed to gravitate, making of the Little Entente little more than a void name and of all Eastern units from Baltic to Aegean, despite all their irreconcilable ferments, an emergency unity of one black-brown colour, in the midst of which Czechoslovakia still floated, bewildered, lonely, half consciously prepared for an Ethiopian destiny. Magnates and huntsmen, on both slopes of the Carpathians, were thinking of new tallyhos on peons, on Jews, on Bolsheviks, in the free-for-all of general war; the King of Greece had grown absent-minded about his mentors in Buckingham Palace and Whitehall; Zog, the Mohammedan leaseholder of Albania, was carefully selecting a Fascist-Catholic beauty with apanage to woo in Italy; Ataturk entertained a quarrel with France; Beck the Pole, the busiest of all in the inspiring confusion, was shuttling from one to the other of those colourful capitals while concentrating for the moment on the rather unusual ambition of debauching Bucharest. True, the march of Fascism had been halted at the gates of Brussels and Madrid. But even rejecting impartially Trotsky's contention that Stalinism is Fascism of a sort and Stalin's assumption that Trotskyism is Fascism altogether, even leaving Russia to itself, a world in itself, and discounting the forecast of a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement which an unastonishable world had registered, soon to forget about it—the Father of the Church who once awoke at the nightmare of all Christianity falling to the heresy of Arius might equally well have stared now at Europe going Fascist from bound to bound, from sea to sea.

Such, opposite to the hopeful picture sketched above, was the fearful one at the middle of 1937, on the eve of murder-inciting summer. Nothing in the frame of darkness, however, was done, until all was done. Nothing, in other words, was done until the Duce could not persuade Germany to start his war. Vexing perplexities met there the rashness of his desire.

Nazism, strangely enough, had in recent times developed to a kind of limited despotism, with the despot's will kept in balance between the contrasting pushes of a radical and a moderate group. The former would have willingly given in to the call of the Roman master, whom they fondly revered, and "without whose black shirts," as Göring confessed in an outburst of moving gratitude, "no brown shirts would ever have seen the sun of history." But the moderates, possibly the Bank, possibly the army, still clung to the brakes. The Western world, immovable in the expectation of a war-mad Nazism dragging with it a braggart but wavering Fascism, was faced—helplessly incredulous—with the converse. Another difference, the most substantial one, had developed or become apparent between Nazism and Fascism: the former coming out more and more as a collective and national drive, while the latter, as far as Mussolini was concerned, remained what it had been from the first day: sheer individual anarchism. Nazism had made of Germany a revolting freak; they cared, however, for that kind of Germany, and did not like to hurl their fatherland into the furnace of a second world war, without having weighed the chances; which operation was, on the contrary, so far as Italy was concerned, perfectly indifferent to Mussolini if it happened to contain the only chances left for his personal fulfilment in glory, or greatness in tragedy, or even safety alone. Nazism, moreover, wanted an Empire for Germany rather than military glory for military glory's sake; since Germany, even in her most demented exponents, had little or nothing to do with the myth of national cowardice forced by Machiavelli on the mind of his unfortunate nation. To be sure, spectacular successes and territorial acquisitions were inescapable requirements for Nazism too, should it remain in power; and 1937, with the alarming plight of national economy and the insistent gleams of civil or religious strife smouldering under the cinders of German liberty, not yet so thoroughly extinguished as the Italian had been long since, seemed to be an hour of decision, a deadline of some sort, for Nazism nearly as well

as for Fascism. But not equally sure was it that those indispensable laurels should be wrung at all cost in a fight with England: a nation against which Nazism's feeling did not run half so high as did the Duce's. They knew of course how corrupt and mongrelized and mean England was nowadays; yet, thinking with their blood, they could not help pondering the streaks of "Aryan" blood not yet wholly polluted in their Northern cousins. This qualified benevolence was more frankly reciprocated by many of the best people in London. A compromise was thinkable. In Africa, if nothing else, there were Portugal's very many acres: a no-man's-land; the money for a legal bargain being presumably available at a reasonable rate of interest in the City itself. Should Germany have felt an irresistible urge toward Czechoslovakia and Austria, it was not past doubt that England would have swung her newly sharpened sword. More probably, at the wink of Baldwin or better still of Neville Chamberlain, the committee on non-intervention, well tested in Spain, would have been called again; nor was it too fantastic to surmise that an institution of that sort, comforted by the League of Nations, would have done good work to circumscribe the fire, even if ever Nazism elected the Ukraine or another chunk of Russia as the promised land for German supernumerary farmers.

This latter enterprise, however, belonged in the schemes of a comparatively vague future. As far as the present and an imminent morrow were in sight, it might look as if the Roman master and the German disciple were marching arm in arm, at a seemingly concerted pace, yet one pushing and gazing west while the other did his best to veer east and south-east. The old river Danube, the well-known directrix Berlin-Baghdad, invited the Führer as it had the Kaiser. Not that straight south had been wiped out of the map, or that the German song claiming the Latin river Adige had been disowned by the German heart. Dolomites darted skyward, as effulgent as ever; terraces, overhung with vine, jutted from Meran and Bozen and from all of Alto Adige as the usurpers had counterfeited the name of Süd-

tirol, inalienable balcony of Germany on sunshine; blue breakers, as of old, fringed the rim of Trieste, the irreplaceable outlet of Middle Europe on the Mediterranean. Well-bred endurance and silence screened these goals, unforgettable, before Nazi Germany as long, perhaps, as the revered Roman master lived: under the understood proviso, however, that he would not live for ever.

In one matter alone did Führer and Duce agree unreservedly: this being the future of France, should the call for a joint march on Paris be definitely disregarded by the hesitant Führer. England seemed not yet inclined to turn a deaf ear to guns roaring across the Channel; nor had the authority of the non-intervention committee yet expanded so far. Should the march from outside be meanwhile postponed, a march of some sort ought to be nursed inside. A Laval, a Doriot, a Fiery Cross, a Camelot du Roi, a Pretender or Restorer of any sort whatsoever, must oust the red Jew Blum or his successors, and France meet her saviour. Then, the last stronghold of freedom and reason having gone to pieces in Europe, the sun of Nazi-Fascism would rise, majestically although slowly, from the continental blockade on Britain and the British Empire without need of London's being burned to ashes. It would rise also, in due course of its circling west, on America, lulled in the fond conviction that her belt of oceans, which had been forced by civilization faring on the frail, snail-paced caravels of four centuries ago, would stand proof against the mechanized, quick-as-lightning, broadcasting, sky-spanning savagery of our days.

Perhaps the outlook, although visioned by moderate Nazism, was meant to convey gratification of some sort to the founder and leader of Fascism in Rome, as well. He it was who as early as 1932 had pre-announced and willed all Europe Fascist or Fascitized within ten years. Now the plan was likely to run ahead of schedule; it was victory of some sort. Victory, one more ideological victory, good for editorials and posters; with a universal empire, if any, for Germany's house-painter; with no worth-

while triumph for himself, no riding on horseback under Roman arches, no beautiful flame of world-conflagration, no double coronation as Cæsar Augustus under the dome of St. Peter's and on the Capitoline Hill. Frustration.

Thus, destiny hung in suspense.

Intellectual logic made for war. Too vast had grown the chasm between the conflicting systems, vaster than any which had been filled up with corpses in former religious carnages. Ideas had been betrayed wholesale by each and all: freedom and justice by Western democracies, Socialism and Marxism by Eastern Communism, God by his high priests. Resistances had been sapped. But evil had stood adamant in its service to evil, and no bridge overhung the chasm.

Moral logic made for war. Crime called for atonement, drafting guilty and guiltless alike. "It will be blood; they say blood will have blood."

Economic logic made for war and revolution. Too sharply polarized were interests and classes. Too consistent and obdurate were Fascism and Nazism in the sabotage of any Western attempt at revival of trade and dismantlement of barriers: with the twofold purpose of enhancing the state's self-sufficiency in materials and output requisite for war and of pressing their slaves against the dilemma of starving or fighting.

Psychology, more bland, and common sense pointed to more detailed circumstances, and signally to the shabby stuff of which those Goliaths were made; hence prognosticating compromise, and delay with decay. Fascism, they were confident, would fall first, to be followed by Nazism; since, as Germans put it in their proverb, when the hat flies the cloak flies next.

Prophecy, a risky venture even when accountable social and rational forces rule the events, was but gambling in 1937 when the destiny of mankind lay in the irresponsible urges of a small group of half-human individuals. No ship's course is predictable if the pilot is blind. Supposing that Germany should definitively

shift toward moderate, or Anglophile, Nazism, dodging the Duce's lust for immediate war, then the destiny of mankind would have become for a while the business of one man, devastation or hope hinging on the issue of a combat between libido and fear in that single man's heart.

Be it as it may. Even in the worst of cases, even if Fascism should wage war, even if it should win it, it would be victory to have sided with the loser's part. It is Boëthius who lives, and his conquering executioners are long dead. Grass, new green grass, grew after the hoofs of the Huns' cavalcade.

Surely, this is the Great Perversion; nor does the amazingly small measure of its representative men contrast, as it might seem, with the magnitude of their significance. The Spirit, holy or unholy, wandereth where it listeth; and if it is supposed that the Holy Ghost picked for his purpose an inconspicuous girl from among the Jewish crowd, neither did anything prevent the Spirit of Radical Evil from manifesting its miracles through the doings of a couple of undersized Calibans. Or should it rather have taken abode in tall minds and magnanimous hearts?

This is the greatest and deadliest and most gratuitous perversion in man's annals. "And then came," as we have read in Poe's *Black Cat*, "the spirit of Perverseness. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet . . . perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of man. . . . It was this unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature, to do wrong for the wrong's sake only."

Should Fascism win a world war, then the blackness of the coming age would make the so-called Dark Ages of the past seem as bright as sunshine. They never at their darkest wilfully rejected the unbroken tradition of man. They were, or tried to be, Platonic and Christian.

The equivalence of the two perils, Fascism and Communism

—not to speak of preferences accorded to the former—is a half-conscious lie of the panic-stricken propertied classes. Russian Communism—now in one way or another on the wane, at least as far as the Marxist-Leninist formula is concerned—hurt interests, maybe legitimate. It also hurt feelings, certainly sacred. But even in the obtuse-minded barrenness of its self-styled atheism, it reserved a wide place for the cult of ideas and hopes which were dear to old Plato and to young Christ alike, and which make the very substance of God.

No interest has been saved, no feeling has been spared by Fascism; and all fine things of earth and sky have been defiled. May the world-confusion be as short as it is ruinous, the dawn as near as the night is deep.

Dawn, however, will rise, in days or generations. And a great lesson will have been bequeathed by the black age to man. From the gratuitousness of Fascism, from the towering heights to which Destruction was lifted by it on foundations of pure perverseness and idiocy without any concourse of necessity or motives, man will learn a higher estimate of the power which resides in his imagination and will.

A new earth and society is rising in the will and imagination of man. This society will fuse all the older religions in a common belief enlightened by the freedom of philosophy and science. This society will realize at last that the earth—fecundated by a science which man, its author, long failed to master—is mature for a Golden Age, generous to billions. The individual's endeavour will meet its reward; castes and privileges will have been shattered. Bread will forget fear; love will not know shame. Politics, usually the rule of the best by the worst, will be falling into desuetude. Of all fading fatherlands one Brotherland will be made, for men to fight united, according to Leopardi's testamentary hymn, their common enemies, untamed Nature and Death. (

This is Utopia. But what is man's earth if not the place pre-designed for Utopia? Time, indeed, hardly is in the hand of



man. Time is the inmost substance of what men call God. But what men have dreamed and willed, in good or evil, God and time have fulfilled.

Thus it happened when they invented fratricide. Thus it had happened long before when their ape-like ancestors dared to stand upright, setting free their hands to create and their eyes to look upward.

AS FOR OUR BROTHERS IN ITALY





**A**S FOR OUR BROTHERS IN ITALY, it may be expected that they will not wait until the day of Utopia to open their eyes. It is even presumable that they may choose to awake ere this one world war, which they started unknowingly in 1911 with the Libyan conquest and which is still going on, finds its close in their own and in others' catastrophe and in battles, perhaps, fought as in former times in the valley of the Po.

Perhaps they will consider their present status and circumstances. They will see their newly won Empire: similar to those drawing rooms of plush and gilded frames of their petty bourgeoisie, with chairs hardly fit to sit in and the family pantry near by practically empty. They will figure the price of their new military glory, which all foreigners ignore and in which they themselves cannot afford to believe. They will measure the bereavement and penury of the many, despoiled of their earnings, defrauded of their food, to feed a preposterous machine of war; and even the lucky few, the robber barons who throve on the nation's disaster, shall appear to be not at all the happy few: shaken as they are between the conflicting fears of the all-devouring regime and of a coming revolution. They will contemplate their Corporate State, where the conciliatory legislation of capital and labour freely enacted among free people twenty or forty years ago in New Zealand, in Australia, in Norway, in Mexico herself, has been translated into the gesture of the affectionate Fascist employer thinking of his employee: "I will enclose him with a soldier's arm." Finally, if they look down on themselves, they will vision themselves as creeping, scurrying mice in cat-haunted slums. Speaking, laughing, thinking, breathing, are high treason in them. The

mail is interfered with, the telephone is tapped, the shadows of the strollers are lengthened by eavesdroppers, the doorman is a policeman, the servant a spy, the friend may be a traitor, the wife a corrupter. The offspring, returning from the pestilent school, flood parents and home with foul propaganda. Theatre and cinema, periodical and book, day after day, year after year, pour out inexhaustibly the same exhausting stuff. If, sick of tedium and lies, they gather around a radio in a remote café, whatever resonances of life of happier countries, whatever crumbs of uncensored truth they may snatch from the short waves—as long as Blackshirts, bursting in, do not smash sound-box and patrons alike—they gulp in secrecy and guilt like hungry thieves.

Perhaps they will stop in the routine of their distress, and blush. They will ask themselves what is the use of dishonour and indignity inflicted on them, of happiness curtailed, of their collective repute dwindling among those who lead the judgment of the world. They will wonder whether the path to national glory is really paved with national infamy. Perhaps also, listening to the warnings from the under-soil of the national unitary state which their fathers built with much toil and blood, they may wonder how it will fare with its sapped foundations when their children shall have taken their place. An idea of brotherhood and justice, the democratic idea of the equality of nations, was the basis of Italy in the Risorgimento. Now the doubt is permissible whether it was very wise engineering to undermine those foundations, prompting Europe to become a *tabula rasa* where no right shall be acknowledged unless it be might. Certainly, they are entitled to be proud of having set the stupendous example, and led the way to the wholesale and pitiless barbarization of all. They have Fascitized and blackened almost all Europe, not to speak of sundry other visible spots on this green-golden-blue planet of ours: an achievement of a sort. They may wonder, however, who will care for them should the Germans decide again to stalk across the Alps along the wonted trek down to the Adriatic and Adige; who will fight at their side if ever England, gone eventually Fascist and having embraced the Italian doctrine of might as right, should care to

station a few British garrisons in South Italy and Sicily, thus to feel less nervous about her lifeline from Gibraltar to Suez.

They will feel how much stronger was the slim building of the Risorgimento, made of hopes and ideas, than the thick walls of their Fascist state, built, like Timur's walls, of lime and of men buried alive. If then, raising their eyes from the abjectness of the effects to the name of the cause, they look up to their Timur, they will marvel at the man whom they have made into a Moloch insatiable, an omnipotent God. They will remember that he used to be a philosopher, whose *Symposium* or *Novum Organum* lives in a lecture entitled *God Does Not Exist*; a novelist, whose *Betrothed* or *Karamazov* is the story of *The Cardinal's Mistress*; a dramatist, whose *Hamlet* or *Cædipus*, a play on the Hundred Days of Napoleon, was served to defenceless audiences for perhaps a hundred evenings. He used to be a teacher; but invidious Fortune never did lift him above the elementary school. As a war-lord and condottiere he went to some front in the rank of corporal for a rather brief season, and his military exit was a very aching but very accidental wound. Journalism was the trade to which he devoted his most persistent endeavours; yet no first-rate paper in Italy or anywhere else would ever have thought of wooing the contributions of his skill. Even his most famed accomplishment, his oratorical genius well known all over the world, heart-sweeping, throng-compelling, unfortunately has been denied so far the opportunity of a test in a public debate with equal rights for his opponent and him, in which the vigour of his dialectics and the impact of his eloquence should lack the support of rifles, or bludgeons, or fists. Surely, in the varied and long history of Italy, the longest and most varied of all, teeming with heroes and swindlers, hardly any other hero ever happened to proceed into the limelight with requisites for greatness so defective. Cola di Rienzo himself, the real model of the Duce, if sized on the Duce's yardstick, emerges as a giant, both mentally and morally.

Yet the obvious appraisal ought not to be an inspiration for hatred and contempt. Intrigued by the contradiction, the Italians should search more studiously into why and how a man like this could rise

to such an eminence in might and destruction. The magnitude both of his intentions and of the issues affecting all mankind which are involved in them, the intensity of his power, there is hardly any denying. But if the Italians will confront the bewildering paradox in a sober frame of mind, they will easily discover that whatever greatness there is in Mussolini, they gave it to him, and it is nothing else than their own collective greatness, in their secular trial and error. They it is who filled their empty automaton with the surge of their own imagination; they it is who placed their own words on his lips; they who out of all their seven-century-old dreams made in him this one nightmare. He destroys them, but they maddened him. Beams of truth and reason, of socialism and future, however mixed with the shadow of greed and error, had touched that head in a distant youth. But he saw that too many Italians around him had not ceased yearning for command and primacy, for their Roman gods. He was weak in mind and character, poor in culture, and immensely rich in desire. He submitted to them that he might conquer them. And the Italian tragedy, in reality, has no hero or protagonist to show; it is a chorus with a speaker, a loud-speaker. Seen in the light of a superior justice, which annuls him, thereby somehow exonerating him, Mussolini too, the perverted perverter, seems to deserve his share of pity. Nay, he might even be worthy of pious wishes for conversion in expiation, were not such talk, excellent for the missionary, out of place in history.

Many in Italy, many more than at any time in the past, now know about these things; and the voices of the exiles are their own voices. Many, at last, in the utmost darkness of their servitude, have resolved to gain a clear notion of such factors in their nation's mind and heart as account for past failures and for the present calamities; since Fascism, a contagion grown world-wide with tumours of varied hideousness and stench, still is entitled to be named—if traced to the primary infection—the Italian Disease. If the Italians know themselves, if they decide to know themselves, they will be healed. This is a dictum of ancient and imperishable wisdom. That defective self-knowledge, together with persistence of imaginative and emotional patterns unadjustable to the actual state of society, ordinarily makes the back-

ground of individual crimes and suicides, is a statement of fact current among criminologists and psychiatrists. It is equally true for collective murders and suicides, for nations running amok.

Too stubbornly, for too long, have the Italians entertained the queerest and most distorted ideas about themselves and others. They have thought themselves a nation of geniuses in a universe of dunces, and a mass of cowards in a world of the brave. For a number of centuries they have stuck to the certitude that they are the authors and proprietors of a civilization which is masterly and matchless, and which magnificently outranks whatever the others, all together, have done or may ever live to do, although, alas, this civilization of theirs has been softened by the very perfection of its maturity. So when Arabs during the Libyan war would raise their unarmed hands and ask mercy, begging: "Bono Taliano," Kindly Italian! the Italians on the whole did not like it; apart from any misgiving of the suppliants' perhaps treacherous aim they resented the reputation of gentleness. The inference from their premisses concerning themselves is plainly that, if they could only manage to become such intrepid killers as are the Gauls, the Teutons, the Britons—or however else may gurgle or fizz the names of those uncouth barbarians—their own excellence in genius being cocksure anyhow, the world would be theirs. This inference might, however, be correct although rather boring, only if the premisses on which it reposes were true; and they are not true. Neither are the Italians, all forty-four millions of them, such geniuses, nor are they such dastards, as they fancy. No other nation, on the contrary, can number so many who have suffered privation and torture, who have bled and died, in causes so stupid.

Not yet has been straightened out an old misunderstanding which divides the opinion of foreign observers from that of the Italians themselves about the nature of the Italian people. They, the Italians think they are or must be ancient Romans; the foreign observer thinks they are, and should care to be, Italians, a stock of modern Europeans. Moreover, the Italians think they are the prime and first-born of nations—which from several angles, not merely chronological, may be accurate—hence deriving, less convincingly, the con



clusion that theirs is the task of lecturing and disciplining the youngsters. The latter, however, feel inclined to think of the Italians, generally, as of children: delightful children indeed, with genius in many cases, with more than a touch of genius in many more—although not in all the forty-four millions—and with a blend of spontaneity and grace flavoured with a popular wisdom, ineffable, as fragrant as their soil; and artists, and kindly too, speaking and singing with angels' tongues, and making gestures with hands like wings: yet children after all, and unwilling to grow up. This, of all reasons which made for the world's leniency toward Italian Fascism, was by far the nicest. They could not think of Italy's children, so charming, as of knaves or fools or both; misdeeds they understated as mischiefs; the whole performance they laid, as long as they could, to Italian artistry, combining the time-honoured cue of a classic revival with a tableau of the condottiere. Granted, this conception of Italy as half-nursery and half-operahouse is remarkably exaggerated, but there is in it more than a grain of truth. Childishness is the Italians' way of seeing too many things with merely bodily eyes, the sensuousness of their apperception; childishness is their hanging to the skirts of mother Authority, their clambering up the knees of father Conformism; childishness also is their shirking when it comes to telling the vapour of dream from the earnest clod of life.

Many Italians agree now that it is high time for Italy to come of age: a painful transition, undoubtedly. This means that they are making ready to extend a reverent salute to the past, and to face the new road. It was said: "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." It might be said that, deep and strong as are the roots of Italy in the past, it would hardly be a good idea for a tree to inter its branches and foliage with the grandeur of the roots, there to bloom and fructify. Let them breathe the morning air. Let them grow. Stop this talk of rebirths and renaissances, rebounding from age to age; and see to it that at last you be born. The Italians of seventy years ago, the Redshirts of Garibaldi, plotting and battling for their long-forbidden capital, had an outcry: Rome or Death. But the Italians of today should think: Rome and Death. Rome, as the Black-

shirts have made it signify, is death. To be sure, there is one element of the history of Rome which lives for ever. It is the thought of the unity of mankind, which was born in Greece but grew there; it is the purpose of the unity of mankind, which was planned there. But this thought and purpose now belong to the round revolving earth; they are more likely to be fulfilled in a march from Rome than in any march on Rome.

It should nowadays be familiar to all that of all marks of inferiority, longing for superiority constitutes the most blatant. When the Italians pull this thorn from their foot, they will rise and walk. As for the place in the sun to which they rightly aspire, they will have it as soon as they quit their place in the moon of unreasonable desires. Desire for primacy, as they long have meant it, in this multiple world resembles the wish of an astronomer who, confused by this out-of-joint universe, would have rather his native planet restored to the central, self-important place where it used to reside in the pocket-sized astronomy of old. Neither of the two wishes, even if they were attainable, would be worth while.

Too many already have fallen and perished; too many still are suffering degradation and wrong, in the stupid cause. It was said by Plato that "the interests of rulers require that their subjects should be poor in spirit"; but there ought to be moderation even in stupidity. If the Italians chose to wake up, it would be day. If they assembled in their squares, saying instead of *Duce! Duce!* their well-known, their really imperial syllables, *Basta! Basta!* the nightmare would vanish; since Fascism, for all its horror, is hollowness and nil, and such stuff as nightmares are made on. Then, easily, the king-emperor would have bestowed on him the only title he still lacks, which is that of Pretender; and, perhaps, the un-Christian, un-Catholic, un-Apostolic Roman Church would cease being Roman too. Or, otherwise, they might learn to consider it with the serene understanding and the appropriate toleration of the American miss who, after a papal ceremony in St. Peter's, wrote home: "Splendid. Also ridiculous."

Catholicity is the only really imperishable substance of the Roman

Catholic effort, as it was of ancient Rome. This the Italians can now conceal from themselves no longer; they will go to the core of their bimillenary consistency, leaving out the scoriæ. Freed of shackles and ghosts, they will be able to use fully at last, in the happier pride of being fully human, the ingenuity and vitality of their race, of which even Fascism in its hopeless strain gave a kind of evidence *ad absurdum*: unexhausted reserves, almost miraculous if they care for miracles; assets higher than heaps of raw materials, deeper than wells of oil. If they want inspiration from the past, their past, cleared of weeds, provides plenty. There they find the resources, yes, of their strange naïveté, uncorrupted even through guilt; there the meaning of the really matchless splendour, at once *allegro* and *penseroso*, of their destiny-ridden territory. Tracing their experience back to the Middle Ages they meet there the felicitous example of creative plurality in their Communes: this, individual initiative, being together with universality of purpose one among the features of the new world-society which will be born. But it is from all ages that they can derive the stimulus of their never-tiring service to beauty. In their Dante, however, in the father of all their magnificence and failure, they will seek his personality and eternity rather than the phantoms of his deciduous times. Likewise, in Manzoni they should prefer wisdom and compassion to the spirit of submission; in Leopardi hope to despair; and from their prophet Mazzini they should learn fraternity disregarding primacy.

Even their fateful Machiavelli—whose error, besides, was purged in the unselfishness of his fervour and in the pathos of his frustration, as the fury of Nietzsche found redemption in the innocence of his life and the sublimity of his flight and fall—Machiavelli himself offers some good reading.

"I also think," he wrote in the next to last chapter of *The Prince*, "that that ruler is happy who accords his proceedings with the qualities of his times, and likewise unfortunate that ruler from whose ways of action the times are discordant." This is excellent.

He wrote, shortly before dying: "*Liberate diuturna cura Italiam, extirpate has immanes belluas, quae hominis, praeter faciem et vocem,*

*nihil habent.*" Translated from his rather clumsy Latin into a quicker modern language, this means simply: "Get rid of those beasts."

The passage is in an epistle to the Italians which he dated May 17, 1526. It was the Spanish conquerors that he had in mind. He knew not yet that the oppressors of Italy rise out of her very bosom; not yet had he fully visioned the truth which was to shine so clearly shortly afterwards to the juvenile Anti-Machiavel of France, La Boétie: that all servitude is voluntary and the slave is more despicable than the tyrant is hateful.

In that same epistle Machiavelli had implored the Italians: "You know how many opportunities have been lost. Do not waste this one; neither do any longer confide in staying, trusting fortune and time; for with time not always do the same things come; nor is fortune always the same."

In how many people and things have the Italians of these years confided! They have expected their own freedom from the English, from the Ethiopians, from the League; perhaps now they are expecting it from Spaniard or Russ. They have placed anxious hopes in the assassin's bullet, in the conspiracies of bacilli, in short-livedness, in accident. They have even worshipped in secrecy the Libyan bull who nearly charged the Duce during his last triumphal jaunt overseas.

Yet it is not through accidental agencies that the Spirit does its works. Even Brutus's blade did not cut. He was better than are most Italians today, and Cæsar was a much bigger man than is their tyrant. Yet Cæsar died, and tyranny lived on. For the seat of tyranny was not in the heart of Cæsar; it was in the hearts of the Romans.

Not from others will the Italians receive freedom, but from themselves; not from Death will they have life, but from



## APPENDIX

### *The Wake of the Events*

The Epilogue to this book (pages 455-468) was written in the middle of May 1937. It was only slightly modified in the proofs.

In the first week of June, Blomberg, the chief of the German General Staff, invited to come to Italy to appraise the fitness of the Fascist armed forces for an immediate great war, subjected them to a comprehensive examination. At the end of it he issued a communiqué in which, while eulogizing the technical achievements of Germany's prospective ally on land, on sea, and in the air, he remained fairly non-committal as to the decisive factor: the fighting quality of the Italian soldier. The Italian press was ordered to print the statement in bold-face as if it were an honorary degree conferred on the Italian nation.

The Fascist bugle of war blared all through the month. The German bombing of Almeria, the alleged torpedoing of the *Leipzig* in Spanish waters—another Reichstag fire—Franco's capture of Bilbao, the fall of the French Premier Blum, the collapse of the committee on non-intervention in Spain, the Russian purges, seemed to provide opportunities and encouragements in plenty. According to an American correspondent all Europe lived as if a general war were to break out before the end of August. Before the end of June, *Regime Fascista*, a vanguard of the Fascist press, called for immediate war while France was in turmoil and English rearmament still lagged behind completion. Mussolini himself, though disavowing direct responsibility for the alarum of *Regime Fascista*, published an editorial in which he admitted, however he minimized it, the defeat at Guadalajara, and, denying Italian neutrality in the Spanish war, pledged revenge.

Then, almost suddenly, it became apparent that the moderate or Anglophile faction of Nazism (see page 466), the party of the General Staff and of the Reichsbank, had won—at least for a time—the upper hand. Already the bulk of the German navy had steamed away from the treacherous Mediterranean waters. Hitler's Germany, whose totalitarianism was unable

so far not only to cope with the financial and economic plight but even to crush religious dissent, refused to join the Duce's march on Paris, the Duce's flight on London.

It also seemed clear, as a consequence, that the "combat between libido and fear in that single man's heart" had been decided in favour of the latter urge and that man-murdering summer had little in store now for the leader of Fascism except mock warfare from the Alps to Sicily. The outcome seemed consistent both with the logic of the plot and with the character of the protagonist.

Thus the macabre flirtation between England and Fascism could start again. First Mussolini consented (July 9) to stop his anti-British radio propaganda in the Moslem world, and of this his resolve he notified Foreign Secretary Eden directly. Later in July, Neville Chamberlain, the new British Premier, addressed a friendly and private letter to the Duce; and—certainly inspired by the previous successes of John Simon and Stanley Baldwin, of Samuel Hoare and Anthony Eden, but, behind them all, of the prominent string-puller, Sir Robert Vansittart—he turned England's cheek again to the Fascist kiss.

The purpose of the British party in office obviously was to save peace, rearmament, and liberalism in England; Fascism and order in Italy, life-line for the British Empire; tradition, progress, security for the propertied classes; and common sense for all the others, in a Western world made responsive to gentlemen's agreements and disciplined under the benevolent and exclusive rule of a half-holy alliance or Four Power pact. More briefly, its purpose was to save everything but honour. The price anticipated was none too high. Apart from what might eventually happen to Czechs or Austrians or Ukrainians or other such people in other such places, only Chinese and Spaniards were expected to pay.

On the other hand the Duce of Fascism met the British advances with a rather careful and even dilatory demeanour. He did not discourage them; but neither did he rush to the embrace. Not yet was all irretrievably lost for him.

In Spain, while the spearheads of the Fascist armies pointed to all vital points, a Fascist-nursed anarchist conspiracy bored from within, mixing the loyalist epic—perhaps bound for decay—with internecine strife and crime, a civil war in the civil war. In the Far East, Japan, whose government wholly ignored popular opinion and parliamentary reversals, after having satisfactorily tested the non-resistance of Stalin's Russia on the Amur, marched on Peiping and further south. These were remote flames indeed; they flashed, however, with lurid if vague promises.

To be sure, the plan of British rearmament loomed forbidding. But it

was not unthinkable that a pacifist conference of the world powers might put an end to the "disastrous race," stabilizing at about the present level the ratio of armaments and thus preserving a fair chance of future blood and arson for the Fascist god of war. America, credulous America, had already been singled out to execute the Duce's stratagem, and President Roosevelt was repeatedly being urged to convoke the parley.

Still on July 24, with the British flirtation well on its way, the Duce of Fascism published an article announcing that "reality," i.e., war, soon would dispel all kinds of "post-war fictions."

Still well along in August he was visibly unprepared to admit that the march of Fascism had come to a dead end and the dream of world fire and world empire was ineluctably fading with the fateful summer of 1937; still he probably was visioning, in terms of d'Annunzio and Nietzsche, "dawns yet unborn."

*August 13, 1937.*

















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